

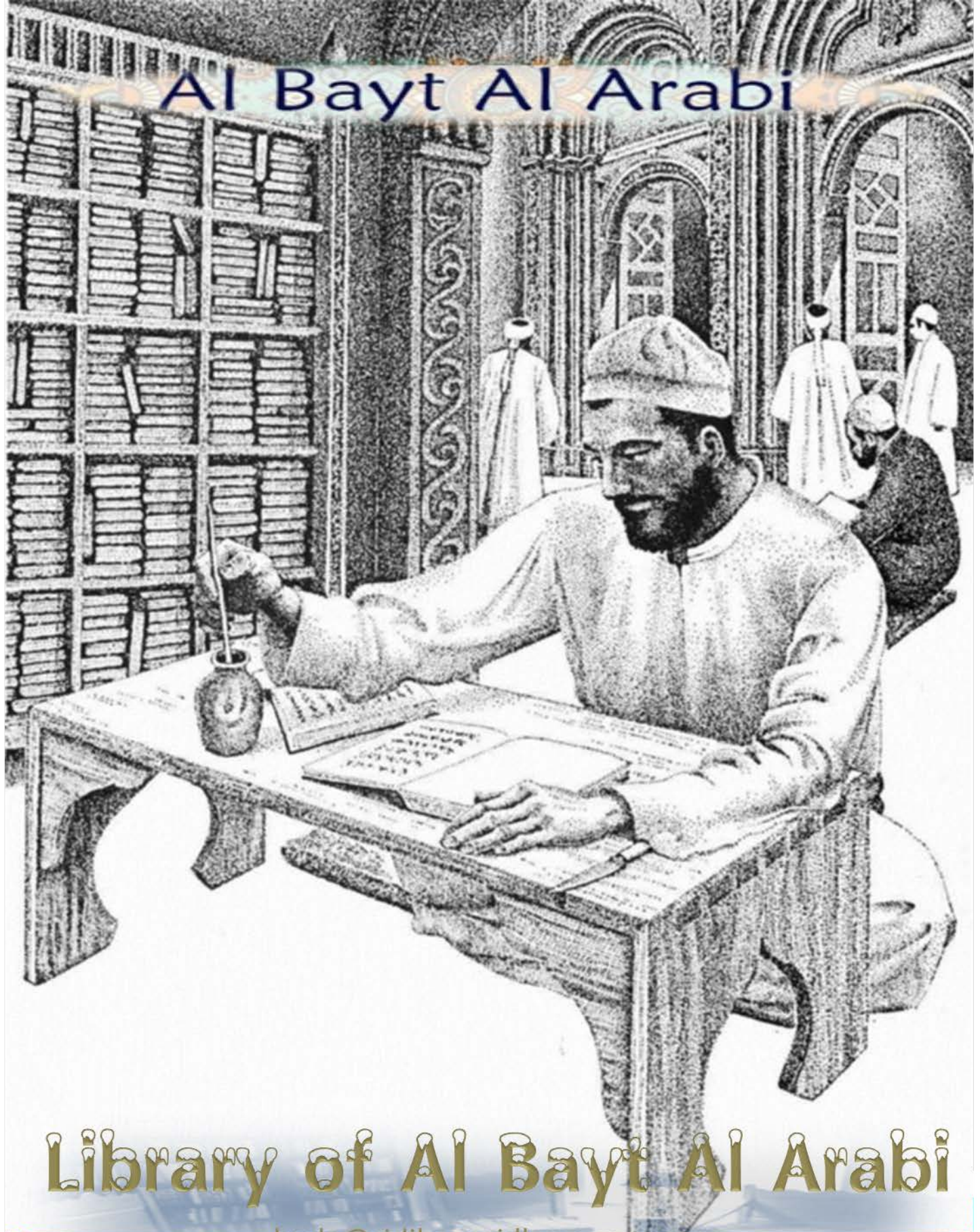
The Graying of the Raven



Cultural
and
Sociopolitical Significance
of
Algerian Folk Poetry

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AUC Middle East Studies Award
2000

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Sociopolitical Significance
of Algerian Folk Poetry



Aida Adib Bamia

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To the Algerian People

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Note on Transliteration

I have adopted the transliteration system of the International Journal of Middle East Studies for the Arabic terms. Note that the reflex of Classical Arabic *qāf* in Colloquial Algerian is /g/. I have indicated the plural of some Arabic words such as *maddāh*, *gawwāl*, *walī* and *khalīfa* with an 's' to avoid the pitfalls of Arabic broken plurals in an English text.

I have tried to the best of my ability to reproduce the tones used in Colloquial Algerian in transliterated quotations from the poems. The limitations of the transliteration system do not always make this possible, and nothing short of an audio recording would do the poems justice. I apologize for any shortcoming due to the transliteration system or to my failure to identify syllabic stresses. Nothing equals the performance of a *maddāh*, naturally.

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Introduction

Muḥammad bin al-Ṭayyib ʿAlilī was an Algerian folk poet who lived in the first half of the twentieth century, under French colonial rule. His poems stand out among those of his contemporaries for their timeless quality and the universal nature of their underlying philosophy. The issues raised by the poet revolve around the abuse of power and political and religious manipulations, making him an avant-garde poet in tune with his time. This self-appointed defender of the “wretched of the earth” (in Franz Fanon’s phrase), is an efficient spokesman for his own people, particularly the Algerian peasants. He acts, in fact, as a foreign eye, depicting what his countrymen fail to see. He promotes reformism and is in tune with the position of the Association of the Muslim ʿUlama of Algeria, founded in 1931 in Constantine in eastern Algeria. ʿAlilī’s humor and verbal caricature recall the style of the well-known Arab trickster, Juḥā. Original and innovative, he does not fail to grip his readers, just as he must have ensnared his live audiences when he recited his poems in Duperré (present-day ʿAyn al-Difla).

Very little is known about ʿAlilī’s life, his exact birth and death dates, his family, or his social activities. It is possible, however, to assign approximate dates from the information provided by Mohammed Hadj-Sadok,¹ the primary collector of his poems. Hadj-Sadok first met ʿAlilī in 1949, when the poet was around fifty-five years old, so he was probably born around 1894. He died in his early sixties, which places his death date in the mid-1950s, either before the beginning of the Algerian war of independence (1954–62) or as it had just begun.

Mohammed Hadj-Sadok was instrumental in saving ʿAlilī’s poems from total loss. They owe their preservation to his diligence and interest in the genre. The story of the two men’s acquaintance deserves to be told in detail, as it sheds light on Hadj-Sadok’s contribution to education in Algeria. The young Hadj-Sadok was in Paris finishing his studies for the *agrégation*—a highly competitive French examination required for lycée teachers—when a friend invited him to dinner. An important guest at the same dinner was the French minister of national education, Marcel Naegelen. Less than a year

later, in 1948, Naegelen was appointed *gouverneur général* of Algeria. Soon after he took office, he invited the young Algerian laureate to join his cabinet and assigned him the responsibility of supervising the education system throughout Algeria, with the title of *chef adjoint*. This position required extensive travel, and on one of his visits to western Algeria, Hadj-Sadok met Bin al-Ṭayyib °Alili, a farmer from Duperré, a poor *khammās*² struggling to feed his family.

Motivated by his love for folk poetry as well as his eagerness to protect his country's cultural heritage, Hadj-Sadok wrote down most of °Alili's poems as he recited them to curious and amused audiences, while sipping coffee at his village café, in line with the tradition in other Arab countries, during the heyday of the *rāwī*, the reciter of epic poems and folk tales. °Alili sat either on the café floor or on a bench to recite his poems, surrounded by his audience. Intrigued by this poor but gifted poet, Hadj-Sadok helped him find some material comfort when an injury made it impossible for him to continue his strenuous life as a farmer, providing him with financial assistance through the office of the *gouverneur général*. This generous act prompted the poet to compose poems in praise of Hadj-Sadok. The only poems that Hadj-Sadok neither heard directly nor copied himself were the four praise poems °Alili composed to thank him for his financial support.³ These were copied by students of a Qur'ānic school whose knowledge of Arabic was almost certainly limited to the memorization of the Qur'ān. They were, in Hadj-Sadok's words, "semi-literate."⁴ Due to the laudatory nature of these poems, Hadj-Sadok has consistently refused to include them in the poet's repertoire. I was not able to read them until the summer of 1999 as I showed him the complete manuscript of this book. He is strongly opposed to their publication in full and gave me permission only to quote individual verses in order to illustrate a point. I will comment on the poems in the relevant section.

Hadj-Sadok's interest in °Alili's poetry stemmed from a wider project consisting of a dissertation on Algerian folklore he intended to write for a doctorate degree. Although the project never materialized, Hadj-Sadok continued to collect and classify Algerian folk poetry, occasionally writing articles on the subject.⁵

It is impossible to relate the story of Hadj-Sadok's involvement with folk poetry without talking about Mrs. Hadj-Sadok. In fact, it was her father, °Abd al-Qādir Lighrisī, himself a seasoned poet, who nurtured in his young son-in-law an appreciation for folk music, songs, and poetry. As Hadj-Sadok's passion for folk art grew, father- and son-in-law would go to various festivities, listening to and delighting in their country's folk performances. In time, young Hadj-Sadok's appreciation for Algerian folk poetry matured. His work in the field of education during the colonial period took him to rural areas across Algeria where folk poets traditionally abounded, so

he was able to build up his collection. His interest in the genre was common knowledge to people in his entourage. The poets who could not meet him mailed their works to him, while his friends recorded and sent him whatever poems they heard.

Hadj-Sadok's original plan to publish the texts he had gathered and loved through the years was cut short by his own declining health and the realization of the daunting effort required to bring this project to fruition. Instead, he decided to entrust me with the responsibility of introducing °Alili to a wider reading public.⁶ It was an honor I could not refuse and an opportunity to pursue my research in folk literature begun in Algeria.

A welcome burden, the project nevertheless presented risks and concerns. While I did not want to disappoint Hadj-Sadok, I wondered about my ability to convey faithfully the spirit of a poet I had not known personally. I had become fond of °Alili's poetry even before reading the whole collection. My first look at his work occurred purely by coincidence: a poem entitled *al-Rawz* (Rice) had inadvertently slipped between the pages of some Algerian folk tales Hadj-Sadok had lent me to read. The unusual verses provoked my interest and curiosity, and motivated me to learn more about their author. Assured of my eagerness, Hadj-Sadok invited me to study the rest of the poems. When I went to Paris armed with a grant from the American Philosophical Society to undertake my study, Hadj-Sadok finally gave me °Alili's full collection. Another surprise awaited me, as he handed over to me all his unpublished folk poetry, an array of poems by various authors guaranteed to add to and enrich the few published collections available today. It was a windfall!

Experiencing °Alili's poems with Hadj-Sadok and listening to him recount the circumstances of their collection was a rare gift that I never expected to receive. I consider myself fortunate to have been able to listen to the fascinating anecdotes and enlightening stories surrounding Hadj-Sadok's unusual hobby. His explanations as well as his interpretations shed light on the poems and the poet as well as the period during which Muḥammad bin al-Ṭayyib °Alili lived. His contribution remains invaluable; however, I alone assume responsibility for any shortcoming or mistakes in this work.

My determination to persevere, however, came from my own involvement in salvaging Algerian folk literature, which began in the early 1970s when I was assigned to teach a course on Algerian folklore at the University of Constantine, in eastern Algeria. Because there was very little printed material available on the subject, I launched a collection campaign with the help of the students enrolled in the class. I provided the theory and the fieldwork techniques and devised the questionnaire, then sent them on their way to probe eastern Algeria. This project achieved more than its immediate purpose, which was to develop the content for term papers and build up a collection for future generations of students. It sparked Algerian students' interest in their

own folk culture and motivated some of them to undertake graduate research in the field.

While the students were in the process of discovering their folk heritage, their families and communities of friends and neighbors were rather indifferent to it. Some were even reluctant to respond to their questions, embarrassed to share their folk culture with college students whom they expected to be pre-occupied with more respectable subjects! The more outspoken participants wondered whether the university had nothing better to teach! But the students persisted and their efforts paid off.

The project coincided with an official campaign sponsored by the Ministry of Culture to promote folklore on a national level, through festivals and competitions. It was one of the many efforts intended to contribute to a definition of Algerian identity. In an appeal for the cultural decolonization of Algeria, Aḥmad Ṭālib Ibrāhīmī,⁷ who held various ministerial positions after his country's independence in 1962, stressed the importance of his country's folk heritage. He viewed it as the receptacle in which Algerian culture incubated: "National culture is preserved in proverbs, folk songs, and all this oral literature that continues to reflect the life and the struggle of the people" (Ibrahimi 1973: 14). The official interest in folklore was short lived, and a systematic national plan to collect and classify the corpus in order to preserve it for future researchers regrettably never materialized.

Nevertheless, it was a start. As Algerian elders passed away and folk traditions continued to decline, local Algerian scholars and other concerned professionals grew more eager to see their folk heritage preserved. Such concern motivated the journalist Bilqāsim bin ʿAbdallah, editor of the literary page ("al-Nādi al-Adabī") of the Oran daily newspaper *al-Jumhūriyya*, to organize a debate around Algerian folklore, inviting readers and scholars alike to participate in the discussion. The debate, running from November 7 to December 26, 1983, provoked a modest reaction and attracted enthusiastic if qualitatively uneven contributions.

Bin ʿAbdallah's initiative established three strategies for future preservation efforts. First, Algerian folk material needed to be protected, and that required a systematic collection program. Second, all Algerian folk heritage, Arab and Berber alike, was a part of the national patrimony, and the acknowledgment and appreciation of both did not threaten national unity. This point was in response to claims made by Berber groups questioning the legitimacy of the presence of the Arab Algerians in the country. Third, most of the authors who contributed articles to the debate wanted to examine various misconceptions that had plagued folklore studies in postcolonial Algeria, especially those stemming from the initial interest of the colonial administration in certain aspects of Algerian folk culture. Books written by French colonial administrators and researchers—pertinent examples being Eugène Daumas'

Mœurs et coutumes de l'Algérie (1853), Depont and Coppolani's *Les confréries religieuses musulmanes* (1897), and C. Sonneck's *Chants arabes du Maghreb* (1902, 1904)—reveal, in their authors' own words, the true intentions of the colonizer: the French sought to understand the culture of the colonized in order to undermine it, which they did. This situation was compounded by the fact that many of the researchers during French colonial rule were military officers, not civilian scholars, making the study of folklore part of the military strategy and not the subject of a pure literary interest.

The success of the colonial policy of population control and ethnic disruption confirmed Algerians' worst fears and also placed a stigma on folklore studies that endured long after independence. Calls for a fresh perspective thus came at an opportune time.

The sizable collection of contemporary Algerian folk poems in manuscript form presently in my possession would provide students of history, ethnography, linguistics, anthropology, political science, and other branches of the social sciences and the humanities with valuable information on colonial Algeria. My studies of Algerian folklore are a contribution to the scholarship of a country where I lived and taught for eleven years. They are an expression of love for the people who considered me as one of their own. I also undertook this research as part of my belief in the important role folk literature plays in understanding a people. It is an effort to raise the voice of the silent majority, the illiterate who cannot write or disseminate formally and widely the words they utter.

Why should we read the work of Muḥammad bin al-Ṭayyib ʿAlilī? Why devote a book to a poet with a very modest collection of poems—ten known to us—while the unedited collections of some of his contemporaries are far larger? Although quantity should not be a determining factor in literature, it cannot be totally disregarded when the difference in the number of poems is so disproportional, as in ʿAlilī's case. Despite their small number, these poems reveal consistent aspects of the poet's intellectual and artistic abilities. They are much superior in their subtlety, as we shall see in the ensuing chapters, to those of many of his contemporaries. They illustrate magnificently the skills of a poet-storyteller, a creative composer of thematic and structural dimensions, almost unmatched by his contemporaries, a verbal caricaturist who juggled words into new meanings. In brief, ʿAlilī was an innovator whose poems shed light on aspects of Algerian society that have not received the attention they deserve from researchers in the humanities and the social sciences. Historians have much to learn about French colonial policy from folk poetry. In constructing the map of Algeria's folk literature, ʿAlilī's poems make a fresh and unique contribution.

Directions of This Study

A Source of History

This study sees the role of folk poetry as a register of events as yet untapped, “an inexhaustible mine of events, studies of customs, teachings” (Daumas 1853: 114), waiting to be discovered and used.

Without attempting to rewrite the social history of colonial Algeria, this study uses an oral text—the poem—“made permanent by writing it down” (Shryock 1997: 29), to assess the reaction of an individual to historical events. The uniqueness of Bin al-Ṭayyib ‘Alili lies in his instinctive gift for this form of folk literature, his ability to transform insignificant occurrences into lively and entertaining stories. His poetry is deeply anchored in reality, however, with no evocation of personal past glories or heroic deeds.

Ironically, this most destitute poet acts as a self-appointed spokesman for his compatriots. He provides the people’s view of events, unadulterated by politeness or diplomacy. While clearly amused by his own denunciation of his society’s mighty families, the poet offers a wealth of information for the historian. His poems represent what Lacoste-Dujardin considers to be the pedagogical value of folklore (1982), as she believes that the study of oral tradition teaches us lessons such as the social structure of a village and its tribal tensions. Folk poetry provides a means to prevent or circumvent dangerous dissensions and quarrels, and it is an effective tool in conflict resolution.

Folk Poetry as Nostalgia

Folk poetry falls in the domain of nostalgia, which is derived from the Greek words *nostos*, ‘return home,’ and *algos*, ‘pain.’ The evocation of the past, the mental journey back to the time of the ancestors, provides a sense of security akin to being in the safety of one’s home. The return trip to what is perceived—rightly or wrongly—to have been a happier time is generally triggered by feelings of anguish and the threat of insurmountable difficulties on either the personal or the national level.

As a human feeling, an emotion, nostalgia is part of the human psyche, reinforcing the link between literature—folk literature in our case—and psychology, as seen through the eyes of Jung, who described a poet’s work as “an interpretation and illumination of the content of consciousness, of the ineluctable experiences of human life with its eternally recurrent sorrow and joy” (1933: 179). As visionary, the poet leads in perceiving, feeling, and experiencing events that he translates into words. His production has a dual nature. Individually authored and collectively received and transmitted, it becomes the expression of the feelings and emotions of the collectivity, and part and parcel of their shared temporal and spatial ‘home,’ that to which they journey back in their moments of nostalgia, when reality is too painful to face

alone. As such, it pertains to the realm of the “collective unconscious” explained by Jung, in as far as literature is concerned, as “compensatory to the conscious attitude. That is to say they can bring a one-sided, abnormal, or dangerous state of consciousness into equilibrium in an apparently purposive way” (1933: 190–91).

Considered in light of Jung’s concepts, ‘Alili’s modest contribution to the field of Algerian folk poetry serves as the voice of the “collective unconscious,” as our poet was “guided by the unexpressed desire of his times and shows the way, by word or deed, to the attainment of that which everyone blindly craves and expects” (1933: 192). In echoing the collectivity ‘Alili is more than a mere representative of his people, and can be credited, in light of Jung’s definition of art, with having achieved the “essential in a work of art” (1933: 194). He took a number of themes from “the realm of personal life” and transmitted them “from the spirit and heart of the poet as man to the spirit and heart of mankind” (1933: 194).

The blanket of security provided by a past that has already given proof of its endurance is generally sought to illuminate a dark and confusing present, and to guide the steps of the new generation toward a better future. The mere repetition of the expression ‘as the proverb says’ in people’s conversation, followed by its enunciation, illustrates a reliance on the school of the ancestors, a school built on lessons and advice extracted from real-life experience, from others’ anguish, agony, and distress. Jung’s words reinforce the strong link between folk poetry and psychology: “The psychological mode deals with materials drawn from the realm of human consciousness—for instance, with lessons of life, with emotional shocks, the experience of passion and the crises of human destiny in general—all of which go to make up the conscious life of man and his feeling life in particular” (1933: 179). The poet, therefore, acts as a bridge of sorts, assimilating the life experiences of the collectivity and translating them in words that elucidate their significance, leading the listener (in the case of oral literature) to identify with them and to better manage feared or avoided emotions. The process is often achieved through nostalgia, an emotional experience that springs from the present to the past, from action to memory, in a return trip to the past. Nostalgia is a powerful emotion and tool because “it reassures us of past happiness and accomplishment” (Davis 1979: 34). As such it constitutes a quest for consolation, a journey to reconnect with the past induced by painful disappointments, losses and failures experienced in the present, on the personal and, quite often, the national levels. It is immaterial whether the past is glorious or lusterless—what counts is the memory of that past as it exists in the minds of those who recall it. The yearning for the colonial days in post-independence Algeria is an example of this kind of nostalgia. The question becomes then a matter of relativity.

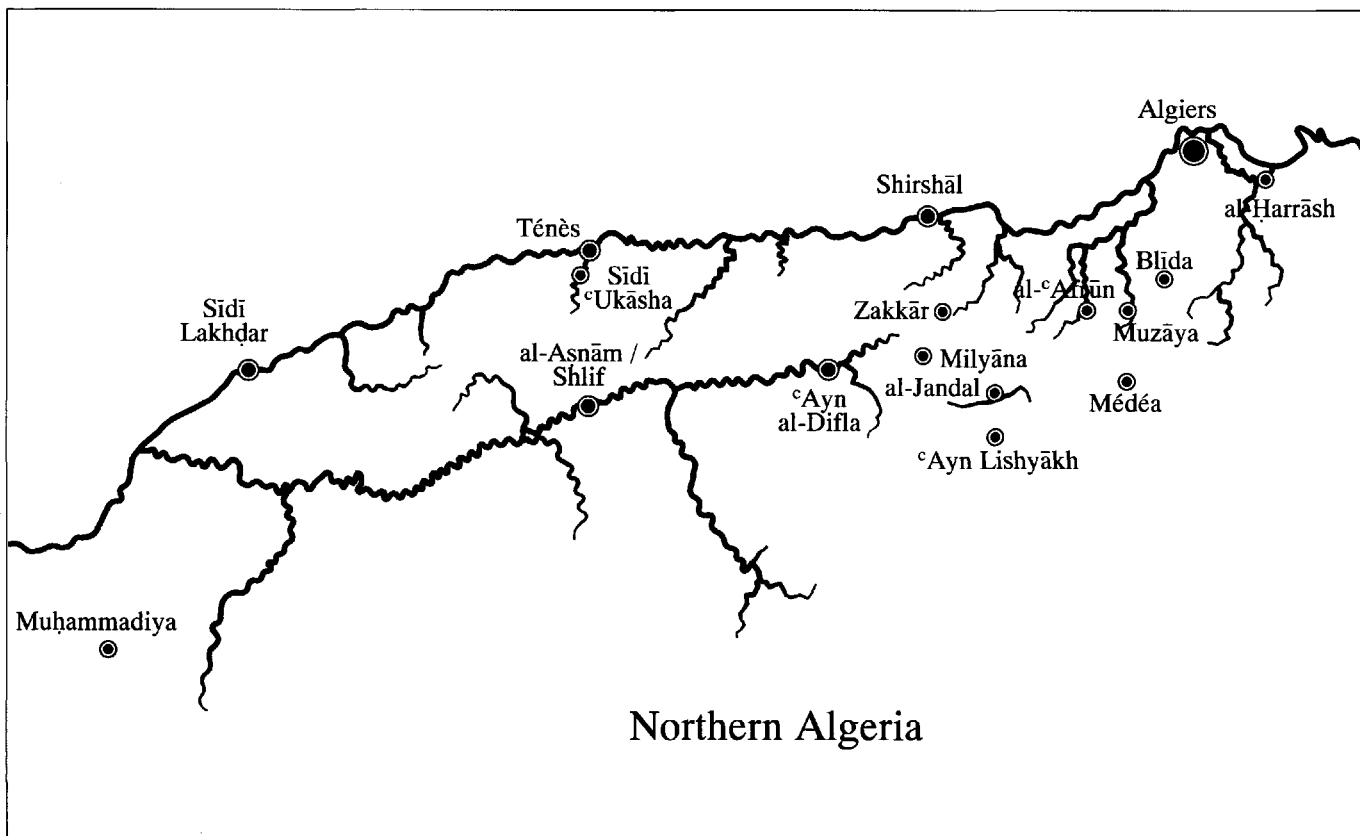
Spatial and temporal nostalgia are not solely the domain of folk literature; they also prevailed in modern fiction where the reaction was strong against the mechanization of life and urban development that resulted in the overpowering invasion of concrete buildings and the loss of green spaces. A nostalgia for the past perceived as a time of innocence, and the countryside as a place of innocence, became the subject of a "nostalgia for elsewhere" (Gualino-Bonn 1999).

In a special way folklore is an expression of this "nostalgia for elsewhere," a semantic and verbal paradise carried in the mind and the heart, a kind of a sheltering tent made of stories, poems, words of wisdom that constitute the realm of the ancestors where one seeks—and usually finds—consolation.

The enmity between colonialism and folklore can be explained by the capacity of the popular culture to highlight the difference between the dominating and the dominated, destroying thus the myth of assimilation, and futile efforts at achieving it. During the Ottoman empire the revival of folk arts such as music and dance, particularly in non-Muslim countries, was banned as they were considered a form of political opposition and an expression of difference under a rule that stressed the homogeneity of its population.

The colonial administration is often misguided in its desire to confirm the success of its policy of integration, relying on the manifestation of some superficial forms of assimilation, such as the adoption of its language or its dress and the emulation of its way of life, as was the case among intellectual Algerians. On another level, however, invisible to the watchful eye of the colonial power interested mainly in maintaining its control, the colonized population draws boundaries that distinguish it from the colonizer, one such example being folk literature. This genre provides it with a means to defeat the censors' barriers and triumphantly communicate daring messages.

From a historical perspective nostalgia is a search for identity, a means to define the self at a time when questions and doubts arise, especially in the face of the colonial efforts, as in Algeria, to erase the people's past and replace it with an alien one. "In the clash of continuities and discontinuities with which life confronts us," writes Fred Davis "nostalgia clearly attends more to the pleas for continuity, to the comforts of sameness" (1979: 33). Furthermore, the contributions of nostalgia to the self are of the domain of personal dignity, as "it simultaneously bestows upon us a certain current worth, however much present circumstances may obscure it or make it suspect" (1979: 34).



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One

The Power of Folk Poetry

There was no one in the street, and Sheikh Yusif felt alone and dismal. Suddenly he had an idea. He delved beneath his cash-box and came up with a large volume in dark yellow paper, and shaking his head he turned its pages. It was the history of Antar, the black slave hero who defeated the oppressors of Egypt, Syria and the other Arab countries. And strength flooded back into his voice, as he read of this black defier of destiny and sultans. A quiver of excitement, of new confidence.

A. R. Sharkawi, *Egyptian Earth* (1962)

If the practice of composing folk literature, especially proverbs and poems, is connected to any branch of the social sciences, its strongest links appear to be with psychology and psychotherapy. So great is the healing power of folk literature on the people that it has often been noted to flourish during periods of repression and profound hardship. Even when their messages did not or could not reach large audiences, folk texts provided their authors and their circle of listeners with relief, making the risk taken in overtly expressing their feelings vis-à-vis the oppressor worthwhile. Introducing the folk poems he collected from various Maghribi countries, Sonneck, a French folklorist and professor at the Ecole Coloniale, commented on their emotional content, their ability to “make it possible for the psychologist to analyze the feelings of the poet” (1904: v). This connection to psychology is supported by Jung’s words: “It is obvious enough that psychology, being the study of psychic processes, can be brought to bear upon the study of literature, for the human psyche is the womb of all the sciences and arts” (1933: 175).

This emotional release is not limited in time, as a person experiencing despair, centuries later, is uplifted through the mere recollection of national heroes and their heroic deeds or by reciting poems celebrating those heroes. In moments of crisis, “when people go astray” (Jung 1933: 191) and they are in need of a guiding light, folk heritage acts as a healing element in the trip of nostalgic recollection.

Colonized Algerians endured the French presence in their country, which was backed by a powerful military machine and landed on their shores in 1830. They saw their hopes of recovering their independence diminish with

the passage of time. As a kind of resignation set in, oral poetry, already quite popular, became a source of consolation and a means for people to manage their frustration with the political situation. As psychotherapy has already revealed, the mere act of venting one's concerns often provides immense relief, especially among wronged and repressed people. An Algerian worker interviewed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu expressed his gratitude for the opportunity he was given to talk about his problems: "I thank you . . . you have given me the opportunity to get matters off my chest" (1963: 261). In the same spirit, the noted French Arabist Joseph Desparmet, as quoted by Fanny Colonna, viewed folk poetry as having a therapeutic role, a means "to comfort the defeated people" (Rivière 1987: 19). The strong connection of folk poetry to psychology does not diminish its ties to other branches of the social sciences and the humanities. It emphasizes the interdisciplinary trend in the study of oral poetry (Finnegan 1977), which is at the core of my interpretation of °Alilī's poetry.

Considered in this light, °Alilī's poems, particularly because of their humor, might have been his way to deal with social inequities as well as to help him cope with his extreme poverty during the colonial period. Ridiculing villagers who cooperated with the colonial power, mimicking the Berbers,⁸ who were favored by the colonial administration, and denouncing the charlatans of popular medicine must have helped the poet vent his frustrations. Oral poetry may have been °Alilī's only public platform. How else could a modest *khammās* reach the ears of a wide audience? With no social clout or education, °Alilī could depend only on the magic of poetry and the entrancing power of its rhyme.

Poetry as Messenger

Both anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod (1986) and folklorist Steven Caton (1990) have interpreted Arabic Bedouin folk poetry as a kind of messenger in a traditional, conservative society. Whether recited by women to convey their amorous sentiments, by men to express notions of "self or personhood" at wedding ceremonies (Caton 1990: 111), or by °Alilī, a destitute and humorous *khammās*, Arabic poetry, both folk and formal, continues to be a powerful verbal tool in Arab societies. In his study of the performance of the Bani Hilāl epic poem in Egypt, Reynolds noted a similar tendency in the mere process of singing *mawwāls* (a poem in colloquial Arabic, often sung accompanied by the music of a reed pipe): "to sing a *mawwāl* is . . . to complain without complaining" (1995: 155). Poetry has the capacity to be both personal and communal, fulfilling the spirit of popular Arabic sayings, favoring indirect messages expressed through allusions and ellipses.⁹ Notable are love poems and

songs, in both classical and colloquial Arabic, where the beloved woman is commonly addressed in masculine linguistic forms by a male singer.

Folk literary genres generally provide their authors with concealing tricks that transmit explosive messages in the disguise of a metaphor or words with a double meaning. This explains why, while written literature struggled to survive under colonial rule in Algeria, folk literature not only continued to thrive but kept the spirit of the people alive during the dark years of “la nuit coloniale.”¹⁰ Alili coated his anger with humor, an approach that helped mitigate the impact of his words on his listeners, especially those directly implicated and whom he often mentioned by name. In *al-Qādūm* (The hoe), though the poet amused the various families named throughout his poem, highlighting their distinguishing features and little flattering traits of character, he clearly conveyed his message of social criticism.

The value of folk poetry as a source for a better understanding of the indigenous population did not escape Sonneck, who saw in it “an initiation tool for those who have contacts with the Muslims and would like to probe more deeply into their thoughts and know better, for the benefit of all, this Arab soul that has remained for so long obstinately closed to us, and many corners of which are still a mystery” (1904: iv).

With growing pressures and controls from the colonial regime, written texts easily fell victim to censorship regulations, greatly discouraging writers and bringing their writing almost to a standstill. Oral poetry, on the other hand, has the advantage of being difficult to control and easy to circulate. The subtleties of its colloquial language and the double meaning of many of its expressions are often inscrutable to non-native speakers. Its elusive meaning even to those learned in classical Arabic provides it with a layer of protection.

The language of orality provides a means for authors to hide behind allusions, alliterations, and metaphors, deeply anchored in their lives and traditions, blurring the meaning for the untrained ears of the colonial censors. Commenting on this aspect of oral poetry, Zumther explains the process: “The singer, much like the story-teller, does not name his subject. Taking hold of an event or an object, intent on giving it a poetic and a social existence, he renders them probable, capable of awakening desire or fear and provoking pain or pleasure. Yet he does not explain them, rather he implies them” (1983: 263). Folk poetry carries a message that the poet strives to transmit to an eager listener, thus establishing an invisible link with his audience and conveying a message that cannot be intercepted by the unsuspecting though watchful eye of the colonial authority.

The need to camouflage messages and emotions in folk poetry gave rise to multi-layered meanings, creating a text within the text, rendering the deciphering of colloquial phrases and expressions a complex and challenging

process. It requires readers to be archaeologists of meaning, to borrow Michel Foucault's terminology, and dig in a text for hidden clues. It is this archaeological nature of folk poetry that ties it to the field of history as a source of information about undocumented events and, more importantly, about aspects of society that traditional historians may tend to disregard.

Historical Overview

There exists in the Arab World a strong tradition of orality in both folk and classical poetry, the latter dating back to the *Jāhiliyya* period (pre-Islamic, fifth century). Both forms, however, have lost much of their prominence, displaced by other literary genres and means of entertainment and a change in peoples' taste. Public recitations are becoming rare events, and professional reciters known as *rāwī* or *maddāh*¹¹ make few appearances and are considered unfashionable. The new generation of Arab children has little interest in its folk heritage. Research undertaken in the second half of the twentieth century by anthropologists, ethnographers, and folklorists mentions the existence of only a few strongholds for such performances in the Arab world. A correlation has been established between folk poetry and a Bedouin (nomadic) society. In other words, the closer a society is to a nomadic way of life, the greater is its attachment to poetry recitation, particularly with a utilitarian purpose (Abu-Lughod 1986; Caton 1990; Reynolds 1995; Shryock 1997). Conversely, the urbanization of Arab societies has led to their growing detachment from public poetry performances as a common source of entertainment, as I observed in 1989, conducting research among folk poets in Amman and Karak, Jordan. The tradition now appears more often to be part of formal government receptions and celebrations. Its popularity and frequency is nevertheless a relative matter, varying greatly from one Arab country to the other and from one region to the other within the same country.

Oral performance gave the non-reading Arab public a means to encourage its culture, unhampered by the limitations of illiteracy. There may be a correlation between the gradual disappearance of public performances and the spread of literacy.

During their heyday, professional reciters, acting as morale boosters in moments of national despair, could captivate their audiences, evoking the glorious deeds of past heroes. Popular figures such as ʿAntar ibn Shaddād, Abū Zayd al-Hilālī, and al-Zāhir Baybars were celebrated with melodies from musical instruments such as the *nāy* (flute) and the *rabāb* (spike-fiddle). Though still in circulation, those poems have lost much of their popularity, due mainly to a general lack of interest in and familiarity with the text. The practice of public performances is also slowly disappearing, pushed aside by

changing social tastes and competition from modern entertainment media. Public performances appear to survive around religious festivals such as that of al-Sayyid al-Badawī in Egypt (Reynolds 1995) and weddings (Caton 1990; Sarhān 1968; °Arniṭa 1968).

Despite diminishing interest, Arab and Islamic societies remain relatively attached to their folk heritage. In the Levant, traditional weddings provide an excellent platform for a poetic practice called *‘atāba*, an exchange of folk verses in praise of the bride and bridegroom, performed as a monologue or a dialogue by both men and women, each performer striving to attribute increasingly superior qualities to his or her side of the wedding party. This popular tradition recalls another practice in classical Arabic poetry, the *naqā’id*, a confrontation between two poets in which each tries to show off his poetic and linguistic prowess. The poems used in the exchange are generally composed spontaneously. The practice of the *bālah* in Yemen (Caton 1990) also recalls this tradition and may have been inspired by it. A similar practice consisting of composing a verse beginning with the letter that ended the previous verse continues to this day in some Arab countries. Poetry, whether classical or folk, more than prose has a dual nature as a tool of seduction and subversion, “a means to persuade, to mediate, to praise” (Slyomovics 1998: 270). The strong ties that link Arabs to poetry afford it a central place in their midst and give them the possibility to toy with it.

Whether spontaneously improvised or recited from memory, oral poetry can also be heard during election campaigns, at receptions for a returning *hajj* (pilgrim), in work songs, and in children’s games. This kind of folk poetry continues to enjoy some popularity in certain circles, due to its simple language, its highly rhythmic nature, and its amusing and often humorous content. Saints’ anniversaries, commonly known as *mawlid*, the most famous of which marks the birth of the Prophet Muḥammad, are often celebrated with chanted folk poems. Folk poetry’s place in Arab societies is special “because it is an integral part of political, social, and religious institutions” (Slyomovics 1998: 270).

Folk Poetry as an Expression of National Identity

During the first decade following Algeria’s independence, and in an effort to ascertain its national identity, the country revived its folk heritage and organized folk festivals. The process of memory “reaching out to historiography” marked the opening of a new phase in the life of this newly independent country, “moving from oral history to the written word” (Slyomovics 1998: 14). Among the variety of subjects pertaining to the country’s folk heritage, a game called *buqalā*, played during the month of

Ramaḍān, was revived through the radio (Bertrand 1983). This game is limited to women and consists of reciting short poems, mostly quatrains in colloquial Arabic. The term *buqalā* is derived from the name of a container, *buqāl*, possibly from the French *bocal* ('jar'). During the recitation a personal object belonging to one of the participants is pulled out of a special, two-handled pot, the *buqāl*. The words of the poem predict a future event in the life of the object's owner, thus combining divination with entertainment. Men are usually excluded from the game, giving women greater freedom in the choice of the poems and their interpretation, often consisting of explicitly sexual or sentimental topics. There are variations in the way the game is played as reported by other researchers (Boucherit 1988; Bertrand 1983), but its significance as a link between the closed world of women and the outside world is stressed by all. Although the poems cover a wide variety of topics, the majority describe amorous encounters, the longing for an absent beloved, or unrequited love. Following are examples of *buqalā* poems I collected in the city of Annaba. Their subject matter reveals the indirect presence of men in the circle, as most poems seem to revolve around a love relationship with a man. It must be mentioned, however, that poems in the game deal with other topics subject to predictions, such as the return of an absent son or husband and pilgrimage to Mecca. An older woman reported that her pilgrimage had been predicted in a *buqalā* game. Here is one poem recited during a *buqalā* game:

Mīr yāl mīr yā ramqāt eṭ-ṭayr
Ṣābnī anā wel-mīr
Fūq es-srīr

مير يالمير يا رمقات الطير
 صابني أنا والمير
 فوق السرير

Mayor, O Mayor! Oh! The looks of the bird!
 He saw me with the mayor
 Sitting on a bed.

The poem clearly refers to a private relationship that a woman had with someone in a position of authority. This amorous encounter, kept closely secret, leaves the woman in a constant state of anxiety as she sees spies everywhere, even among birds.

Another poem reveals a dispute among a number of women over the same man and the efforts made by one of them to win him exclusively to herself:

Sidī Muṣṭafā ʿāyrūnī bik
Mshārka shārkūnī fik
Ental-mkāteb, anā ed-dīwa fik

سيدي مصطفى عايروني بيك
 مشاركة شاركوني فيك
 إنت المكاتب وأنا الديوا فيك

Ental-khātem we anā šbi^c fik
Enta šbābet we anā rjil fik
Nitqārshū ‘alīk
Wellī yeghleb yeddik

إنت الخاتم وأنا أصبغ فيك
 إنت الصبابت وأنا الرجل فيك
 نتقارشو عليك
 واللي يغلب يدك

Because of you, Sidī Muṣṭafā, I was rebuked;
 I will have to share you with the others.
 You are the pen and I the ink,
 You are the ring and I the finger,
 I am the foot and you the slipper.
 We fight over you;
 Whoever wins gets you.

There is an appeal to the man's sense of chivalry to assume responsibility in the matter, reminding him of the strong romantic ties existing between them. The three similes of the pen and the ink, the ring on the finger, and the foot in the shoe indicate the closeness and intimacy of the lovers, which leaves no room for a third party to sneak between them. The images reveal a degree of education on the part of the original composer of this poem, as can be inferred from the reference to the pen and the ink. It is also the voice of a proud woman who compares herself to the foot while referring to the man as the shoe, thus symbolizing control over a man in a feeble position. It is a determined woman who speaks here, ready to fight for her beloved man. Her declaration in the last line is not a projection of an uncertain outcome, but rather, an indirect assertion that she will prevail over the others.

Both poems reveal a degree of libertine behavior among women, unsuspected in a conservative society.

This urban game is gradually disappearing, however, revealing once more the negative correlation between education and folklore. As women become educated and, consequently, part of the work force, they are less isolated and little inclined to participate in similar social games, thus lessening the importance of the role of the *buqalā* as a divination and a link between two worlds. The prediction of the future through the game of the *buqalā* provides women with an aim, cheering them up in the expectation of either an exciting adventure or the fulfillment of a dream. Life between the walls of the traditional large family house, now almost extinct, did not provide women with many opportunities to go out. To overcome their sense of isolation and occasional feelings of oppression, women devised very creative methods to travel in imagination beyond the walls of those homes and the watchful eyes of their doorkeepers. In her book *Dreams of Trespass* (1994), the Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi describes various games improvised by her female relatives to overcome their confinement.¹²

Folk Poetry as History

Folk literary texts shed light on a people's sentiments in a specific period and place. The societal remarks of folk authors on their times and surroundings give their works a documentary value, especially when, adopted by others, they are used to echo their views and their feelings. The parallel between ʿAlilī's views of some members of his society and their condemnation in popular proverbs, as will be developed throughout this study, supports the concept of folk literature as the voice of the people, echoed through generations of reciters or common people. The mere process of perpetuation through oral transmission and the generational reiteration of some texts validate those same texts as true reflections of popular emotions, at a specific period and time. This concept does not overlook differences and disagreements in positions among the same group of people and over the same issue or even a reversal of the individual or collective stand vis-à-vis some events or notions. It is this insider's quality of folk texts that gives them an edge over historical documents, even those obtained through oral interviews. The level of sincerity that accompanies spontaneous compositions, the absence of premeditation, cannot be matched by a premeditated exchange of information. It is probably in view of this notion that the term *al-adab al-tilqāʾi* ('spontaneous literature') is beginning to circulate in Egypt's literary circles (*al-Ahrām*, November 30, 1998), as a more accurate qualifier for this genre.

In her study of Berber Algerian folklore, Camille Lacoste-Dujardin explains the importance of ethnology for history: "Ethnology would thus help historians to break free of the history written by clerks and the privilege of literacy, a history that often belongs to the dominating power" (1982: 82). Post-colonial theories of history would be well served by folk poetry because it is an authentic document that narrates the story of colonial rule from the point of view of the dominated. It is in those folk verses that the emotional motivation for a national movement is best understood. Oral tradition provides an inner knowledge of a society and "gives intimate accounts of populations or layers of populations that are otherwise apprehended only from outside points of view" (Vansina 1985: 197). Such popular reactions may serve as a guide, an indication of the people's position vis-à-vis certain events that have been recorded in history books but are usually stripped of the emotions they triggered. A historian might find in folk literature the deep roots of a political, social, or moral stand undetectable in official historical documents.

Historians must seek the meaning of omissions, exaggerations, or the denigration of others and find a possible expression of a popular position worthy of interpretation. Qāsim (1998) explains folk poetry's total disrespect for one of Salāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī's sons, al-Kāmil, for example, as an

expression of the people's disapproval of the truce he signed with the Crusader Frederic II, which cost the Arabs the city of Jerusalem. Rather than search for facts and dates in folk poetry, the historian should read between the lines the uncensored emotional reactions of a people, the motivations that triggered their wishful thinking, or the utopian world where they sought refuge. The folk heritage of nations must occupy a more visible place in historiography and serve as a source of information on peoples' pasts, particularly the oppressed.

Folk poetry provides valuable information on a sector of society that has been traditionally neglected, namely the rural population. In Algeria's case, villagers were important players in the socioeconomic and political life of the new colony from the start, first as victims and later as resisters. Algerians whose farms were confiscated as a punishment for their various uprisings—such as the revolt of the amir ʿAbd al-Qādir, 1832–39, and the Muqrānī revolt of 1871–72—provided cheap labor for the French settlers. As wine growers from Alsace-Lorraine were among the earliest to arrive in 1880, after phylloxera (plant lice) had damaged their vineyards, the impact of colonialism was deeply felt in the rural areas. In its eagerness to populate the countryside the colonial administration motivated French emigration with the promise of free land for farming. The colonization of the countryside thus moved swiftly, through private and official efforts, stripping the Algerian peasants of their lands. Many were forced to accept employment as daily workers on their own co-opted properties, experiencing thus an enormous trauma of humiliation. Folklore provides the voice of this silent majority often missing in written manuscripts. It is a record of their actions and emotions.

With the current tendency to write history based on diverse references, without relying merely on written documents, folk literature, the voice of the majority, the only audible voice in moments of forced silence, becomes one of postcolonial historians' strongest sources of information. It is then the historian's responsibility to sift through this "raw material of history" (Slyomovics 1998: 18) for a valid recounting of past events.

A folk literary text, like a written text, has a binary significance: that intended by its author, the "sender," and that of the "receiver" (Vansina 1985: 194), the interpreter of meanings that often go beyond their author's initial intent. Being the first 'public' reader of ʿAlilī's poems, I find myself in a rather advantageous position. As a researcher, I assume the role of a pioneer in the field, as the primary interpreter of his work, being neither compelled to refute existing interpretations nor obliged to agree with them. Rather, I am privileged to devote my undivided attention to the complexities of the implicit meanings of the poems and to elucidate their explicit significance displayed through innovative techniques and original, beautiful images.

Folk Traditions and War

Folk heritage played a practical role in colonial Algeria, acting as the weapon of the defenseless and the weak, the tongue and voice of the muzzled and the voiceless. It fulfilled the same role as the memorial books used by displaced Palestinians during the years of occupation in an effort to maintain a mental connection to their place of origin (Slyomovics 1998). Displaced Algerians deflected colonial efforts to destabilize their rural society, though, with a slightly different medium. When they were moved to the 'villages de regroupement' (regroupment centers) established by the French during the war of independence with the intention of depriving the resistance of the rural support, the displaced Algerians found strength in their traditions. They continued to live according to their ancestors' teachings and kept the memory of their villages of origin alive with continuous references to 'the past' and the evocation of what happened in the *dishra* ('village') (Nacib 1981). Two or three large families would unite to form sub-regroupments, replicating "on a small scale their village of origin" (99). They kept traditions alive by "copying exactly, patiently, and tenaciously the private life of the hamlet in order to better confront the occupier from whom it wanted to remain different" (100). French policies intended to urbanize the farmers and tear down their tribal structure failed to achieve their goals. Nacib explains that by centering their efforts on destroying the political and economic forces of the country, the colonizers failed to appreciate the cementing value of traditions in rallying the people to an anti-colonial stand. The French colonial administration made a similar mistake when it discouraged traditional education and fought the efforts of the *zāwīyas* (centers of education, usually attached to a mosque) to educate the people in rudimentary Arabic and Qur'ānic studies (Benachenhou 1971). Ironically, while the policy deprived many Algerians of an education that would otherwise have given them the means to step out of poverty, it contributed unintentionally to the flourishing of folklore as an alternative medium to channel people's frustrations. The confrontation between traditional schools and the French administration is discussed at length in chapter four.

During the long years of the colonial presence, Algerian peasants had watched the powerful French war machine, feeling helpless and hopeless. They diverted their emotions to composing folk poetry, some of which was recited in village gatherings and later published. A few poems were set to music and were sung by well-known singers who contributed greatly to their fame. The story of *Ḥizīyya*, one of the characters of the epic poem *Taghribat Banī Hilāl* (The westward journey of the Banī Hilāl) was put to music and sung, achieving great success. Sabra Webber observed a similar phenomenon in the Tunisian town of Kelibia, where folklore served as emotional release for the people: "Folklore is a tool with which communities can reinforce and

revitalize community identity when it seems the community should be falling apart under the onslaught of, say, western hegemony or the ups and downs of the global economy” (1991: 8). In Algeria, by reconnecting most aspects of their lives to their past, to their ancestors, and to their native villages, the displaced people of Beldj, who came from the mountains of Chenoua, gave weight, depth, and meaning to their life, removing it thus from the superficiality of the moment, transposing to Beldj the life of their villages of origin. Following in the footsteps of their ancestors gave the peasants a deep sense of security.

Folk traditions possess a quality that helps them survive traumatic experiences: their intangible nature allows them to survive as part of the mental baggage of displaced communities. Thus they guarantee the stability of farmers, otherwise achieved in normal times through their cosmic relation to the land. The survival of those traditions is the guarantor against the anxiety of “flottement” (‘floating’) (Nacib 1981: 100).

Folklore and French Colonialism

The officers of the Bureaux Arabes were quick to notice the chronicling of historical events by folk poets as part of the overall oral culture of the people they had colonized. Eugène Daumas (1853), one of the first officers to become interested in Algerian folk poetry, was fascinated with the genre. He explained that every event that had taken place in the country since its conquest by the French in 1830 became the subject of a poem. He cited a long poem by ‘Abd al-Qādir stressing the need to safeguard this kind of poetry for its esthetic value, as well as its historical importance. In view of the paucity of sources written by “ordinary people” (Clancy-Smith 1994: 9) during the colonial period, folk poetry offers a valuable document for the historian. It is in its quality as a source for the understanding of Algeria’s colonial history that ‘Alili’s poetry should be considered, above and beyond its literary value.

Ethnographic studies benefited from folk poetry as well. ‘Alili’s poems shed light on numerous aspects of the social structure in Algerian villages, the role of the religious brotherhoods, the marabouts (in Arabic *murābiṭ*, an individual seeking knowledge and on the path of Sufism), the social and ethnic rivalries, particularly between Berbers and Arabs, and the early signs of technology in rural areas.

Daumas was not the only one to become aware of the value of folk poetry during the colonial period. Another researcher, Sonneck, shared his position regarding the significance of folk poetry as a means to better understand and control the native population: “I believe that the political supervision of the indigenous sector would be useful as well, in order to know exactly what

is being sung and recited in the markets and in the cafés" (1904: iv). Both opinions reveal the utilization of folk poetry as a probing tool into the lives and psyche of a native population, whose sense of privacy and pride was provoked by the presence of an intruding foreign administration implanted in their own country.

Two

The History of the *Malḥūn*

Algerian *Malḥūn*: An Overview

To provide a background for the interpretation of Muḥammad bin al-Ṭayyib ʿAlili's poems, this chapter will examine the history of Algerian folk poetry and the themes that preoccupied folk poets from the French occupation in 1830 to the middle of the twentieth century. A true appreciation of ʿAlili's originality can only be achieved by assessing his texts in the context of his period and in relation to his contemporaries.

The dearth of published collections of Algerian folk poetry as well as the absence of biographical notices of numerous authors whose compositions survived through oral transmission make the task difficult. The significant corpus of unpublished material in my possession, comprising both the poems collected throughout the eleven years I spent in Algeria (1973–84) and those handed to me by Hadj-Sadok, leave serious gaps regarding the dates of composition of the poems and the biographies of their authors. They have, nevertheless, the advantage of covering two regions of Algerian territory, the east and the west. The majority of the repertoire of Algerian folk poetry, vast as it is, remains scattered and undocumented, leaving the researcher with a limited number of recorded and accessible texts from which to draw conclusions and establish trends. But the major trends and tendencies common to this poetic genre can still be outlined.

Defining Malḥūn Poetry

Muḥammad bin al-Ṭayyib ʿAlili's repertoire is part of the folk poetry identified in Algeria and other countries of the Maghrib as *malḥūn*. The term refers to the use of colloquial language with almost total disregard for the rules of grammar and vocalization. This linguistic tendency, which dates back to the Abbasid period (750–1258) and was also widespread in Umayyad Andalusia (711–1492), occurred as a result of the growing number of non-native speakers of Arabic living under Arab rule. The freedom to distort the language grammatically and phonetically must have provided the masses with a deep psychological boost, a liberating feeling, freeing them from formal Arabic's

linguistic restrictions. The ability to compose poetry in the spoken language was not only a means to release their emotions but an opportunity that provided the poetically inclined and gifted to exist on a level parallel if not equal to that of the celebrated poets of their society. If we consider folk poetry a means to channel the feelings of the “powerless against the powerful” (Slyomovics 1998: 270), then the ability to challenge the norms of the language and overcome obstacles must have been a kind of cultural equalizer and a source of revenge for those who could not otherwise have raised their voices. It was as if a social revolution had taken place by means of folk poetry, whether in *zajal* in Andalusia or in *malḥūn* in the Maghrib.

The tendency to commit errors in vowelizing is termed *lahn* in Arabic. By extension any verbal text where such liberty is taken in the grammatical structure of an Arabic sentence, the standard in folk poetry, is classified as *malḥūn*. The passive participle *malḥūn* is derived from a verb with binary significance. The first aspect, as explained above, is purely linguistic. The other meaning of the word highlights the oblique allusions found frequently in folk poetry, as *lahana* does in fact mean to transmit an indirect message that is understood by the one for whom it is meant and not by other listeners. The rather frequent tendency in Arabic love poetry to use masculine speech to refer to a beloved woman is an example of *lahn*. This indirect verbal communication is frequent in both folk and classical poetry, as we can conclude from the following verse by the classical poet al-Fazārī (al-Bustānī 1870: 1885):

منطق رائع وتلحن أحياناً وخير الحديث ما كان لحنا

Manṭiqun rā'ī'un wa tulḥinu aḥyānan wa khayru al-ḥadīth mā kāna laḥnan

Magnificent logic and subtle meanings, the best speech is the indirect one

While the term *malḥūn* is commonly used in the Maghrib to designate folk poetry, the equivalent expression in the Mashriq is *shi'r sha'bī* ('popular poetry'). A folk researcher walks a fine line, however, in the use of this terminology, as the adjective *sha'bī* in the Mashriq implies a connection with the masses, whereas it refers to an urban form of songs and music in Algeria. This explanation does not put an end to the confusion, as critics take great liberty in the use of the terminology pertaining to the field of folk poetry. A case in point is the introduction to Ḥajj 'Abd al-Karīm al-Rāyīs's *Min waḥī al-rabāb* written by 'Abd al-Laṭīf Aḥmad Khālīs. He uses the term *malḥūn* loosely to refer to literary genres other than folk poetry, as he welcomes the publication of the book: "It consists of a collection of poems, sayings, *tawāshīḥ* (post-

classical, stanzaic poem), *azjāl* (poems in strophic form), and rhymed and rhythmic compositions known to us as *malḥūn*" (1982: 7).

Mohammed El-Fasi, another specialist in the field, defines *malḥūn* as the "poetry written in colloquial Moroccan Arabic" (1967: 9). He uses the word *chant* (song), however, to designate folk poetry, even when the poems were never sung (though in his introduction El-Fasi indicates clearly that the texts included in his book were, in fact, poems meant to be sung). In Sonneck's *Chants arabes du Maghreb* (n.d., v. 3) the words *chants* and *poèmes* are used interchangeably, yet both the subtitle to his book and the Introduction to his third volume refer constantly to *poésie populaire*, leaving no doubt that the subject of his research is folk poetry.

The widespread use of French terminology in the study of Maghribi folk poetry, by French and Maghribi researchers alike, is to a large extent responsible for this terminological confusion. It is possible at this point to venture an explanation on the concept of singing, as, loosely used, it means a melodious way of declaiming words, without the help of music or any complex melody. The verb *chanter* in French means more than mere singing: in its long list of definitions of *chanter*, the *Robert* (1995), cites, in addition to singing, "dire, raconter, exalter" ('say, narrate, exalt'), which all apply to folk poetry.

The mix-up might also have resulted from the general tendency among *maddāḥs* to recite folk poems in a performance with some degree of musical sophistication. It is rather common to see a *maddāḥ* declaim a folk poem accompanied by a *rabāb* (spike-fiddle) player, performing minimally in between sections of a poem to give the reciter time to breathe. Sometimes the *rabāb* continues to play lightly in the background during the recitation. In the case of epic poems that have survived many generations of transmission, such as the ones described by Reynolds (1995), the singer and the musician are one and the same. Folk poetry in that case progresses through two levels of existence and propagation, an initial stage of composition with or without immediate recitation, and a second stage where the poem is sung with or without music. According to Tahar (1975: 65), Algerian *malḥūn* poets intended their poetry to be sung, as singing of folk poems had contributed greatly to their popularity and, consequently, their survival. The tendency to favor the singing of folk poems over plain recitation was possibly due to the impact of Andalusian *muwashshahāt* (short poems written in classical Arabic to be expressly sung) on the Maghrib. Algerian *malḥūn* poets were generally concerned with rhyme and rhythm in their compositions, although the structure of their poems was mostly syllabic with an inner rhyme (Tahar, 1975).

Origins of the Malḥūn

The impact of Andalusian poetry on the Maghrib is a tangible reality to the present day. It was first observed in Morocco long before the reconquest of

Spain by Isabella and Ferdinand in 1492, which forced many Moors to settle in the two closest North African countries to Spain, Morocco and Algeria. According to Ibn Khaldūn (1904: 348), a form of the *muwashshaḥa* found its way to the city of Fez in Morocco through an Andalusian named Ibn ʿAmir. Though he wrote his poems of the *muwashshaḥa* type, applying the requirements of grammar, the inhabitants of Fez, seduced by the genre, undertook to compose poems along the same lines but in total disregard for the grammatical inflections of the language. Thus a new genre that Ibn Khaldun called ʿarūḍ *al-balad* was born, a precursor of the *malḥūn* genre (1904: 347). The popularity of the genre in the Maghrib and its wide circulation seeped into people's subconscious, facilitating the initiation of poets, regardless of their understanding of its structure.

There are common structural features that ʿarūḍ *al-balad* shares with *zajal* and to a lesser degree with the *muwashshaḥa* (Tahar 1975). ʿArūḍ *al-balad* has a prelude called a *maṭlaʿ*, consisting of two verses and two hemistichs (known as a *qism*) and rhyming a b a b. The poem ends with a *qifl* (lock), consisting of the last two verses in a stanza. The stanza is known as a *dawr* ('cycle') in Arabic. The first part of the stanza in ʿarūḍ *al-balad* includes two double-rhymed verses (a rhyme in the middle and one at the end). The same is repeated in the three verses that follow and rhyme c d c d c d. The rhyme of the *qifl* is also doubled and is identical to that of the *maṭlaʿ*.

Forms of Algerian Malḥūn

The strophic form of ʿarūḍ *al-balad*, also used in Algerian *malḥūn*, has some variations as to the number of verses in the *maṭlaʿ*: between one and five, with occasionally an even or odd hemistich meant to be repeated by the audience as a refrain. The position of the hemistich may shift to the beginning of the *qifl* rather than its end. Algerian *malḥūn* poets went beyond these forms, placing in the same stanza verses of different meters, while the strophic poem requires all the stanzas to be constructed according to the first one, if not in rhyme, at least in the number of verses and the rhythm of each one (Tahar 1975).

The *muwashshaḥa* and the *zajal*, on the other hand, have more in common with each other than structural similarities. The *muwashshaḥa* borrowed from the *zajal* its concluding verse called *kharja*, whereas the *zajal* helped itself to phrases and expressions from the *muwashshaḥa*. The latter has a double rhyme and is limited to one quatrain, while the *zajal* has more flexibility as to the number of stanzas that form its length: each stanza is composed of three or more verses, and its initial refrain, the *maṭlaʿ*, is followed by a *ghuṣn* ('branch'), with three or more verses in each stanza and a different rhyme for the various stanzas. Its final element is known as the *markaz* ('center') and rhymes with the *maṭlaʿ*. The *malḥūn* shares with *zajal*

the strophic form, but differs from it in greater structural freedom, since it can be composed in the isometric form with a double rhyme, recalling the classical *qaṣida* ('ode').

The *Malḥūn*: Memory of the People

In his effort to convey a sense of the huge amount of folk poetry written by Kabyle poets on the Algerian war of independence, Chaker describes their repertoire as the "archives and memory" of the people (1989: 24). This is also true of Algerian *malḥūn* written in Arabic, as the poets channeled detailed accounts of events and the personal emotions they aroused in this folk literary genre. Folk poetry, a "comrade in solitude" as Finnegan calls it (1992: 180), became both a public register as well as an intimate journal. In other words, a researcher will find in it a reference to the major events that marked the history of the country since 1830, as well as an expression of personal and intimate romantic experiences, both licit and illicit, some camouflaged, others expressed openly.

Thematically, Algerian *malḥūn* can be divided along two major axes: political/historical and personal/romantic. The historical landmarks include events such as the French landing of 1830, marking the beginning of French colonial rule, the Muqrānī revolt of 1870 against the colonial government, the two world wars, the Sétif massacres of 1945 (following a peaceful march to celebrate the armistice, which led to the massacre of hundreds of Algerians), and finally, the Algerian war of independence (1954–62), which galvanized the attention of poets probably more than any other event in the history of the country.

Eugène Daumas commented on the documentary nature of Algerian *malḥūn*: "Since our entry into Algeria no city was occupied, no battle was fought, no major event took place that did not become the subject of a poem recited by an Arab poet" (1853: 114). It is possible to provide an approximate date for most of these poems, thanks to identifiable events mentioned in the texts. Resistance poetry in particular is relatively easy to date, as it evokes events that are part of the historical fabric of Algerian society and cannot be easily missed. Other poems deal with colonial policy and can at least be associated with a certain era, if not always a specific year.

Poems of nostalgia for the country and the family are generally repercussions of major historical events or somehow resulting from them. I refer here to poems composed by soldiers going to war, women left behind by a conscripted husband, son, father, or brother, or those who languished waiting for emigrant workers absent in France and whose yearly visits are never long enough to rebuild disjointed and fragile relations. Fear of never again seeing an absent loved one hovered over the daily lives of women, in particular. As

the early emigrant workers came primarily from the Berber community, the majority of the poems of exile, many of which were collected by Marguerite-Taos Amrouche (1969), were sung by Kabyle rather than Arab women.

Personal poems, on the other hand are more difficult to date unless they refer to an identifiable event, as in an unpublished poem in Hadj-Sadok's collection composed by ʿAbd al-Qāder Lighrisī upon his visit to the World Exhibition in Paris in 1937. Amazed by the city, the first European capital he had seen, he marveled at its beauty:

نعشوق بباريز يا ابني ونقول/نشكرها ما دمت في الحيات
بلاد الملوك والاصول/ويلاد الميراث والخودات

Niʿshaq bārīz yabni wen-qūl nushkurhā mā dumt fil-ḥayāt
Blād el-mlūk wel-uṣūl we blād el-mirāt wel-khūdāt

I am enamored of Paris, my friend, and I say it, I will praise it as
long as I live:
The country of kings and those well born, the country of princes and
beautiful women.

Love poems composed by poets of repute such as ʿAbdallah bin Karyū (1871–1921), a magistrate from the city of Laghwāt, in the Algerian south, can also be dated. Although an efficient judge (“excellent *bachade*”) according to an official administrative report consulted by Cheikh Si Hamza Boubakeur (1990), he was subject to strong criticism for his scandalous behavior—drinking on the bench, and visiting prostitutes—and for paying little attention to his legal wives. His poems reflect his womanizing as well as his reliance on the Algerian desert for his metaphors and poetic images. Those who appreciated folk poetry, however, admired his work and considered him “the number one poet of Laghwāt.”¹³ Here he is bidding goodbye to the woman he loved:

الريم اللي كان دايم جافيني/أنس لي بعدن شرد من ملقاي
كتست لن زل روعه والفني/جليبه خلوف المحبة لهوايا
اغزالي ما هوش فالصحرا جاني/مايفلا وديان وفجوج عرايا

Er-rīm elli kān dāyem jāfinī / ānas leyya baʿdan sharad min malqāyā
Kattastu lan zall rawʿuh wālifnī / jalabūh khlūf el-maḥabba lihawāyā
Ghazālī ma hūsh fiṣ-ṣaḥrā jānī / mā yeflā wedyān we fīj ʿarāyā

The gazelle who long ignored and avoided me is finally my friend;
I treated her softly, reassuring her; she is used to me; the power of
love draws her closer;

My gazelle does not live in the desert, she does not roam the desolate valleys and empty plains.

The image of the gazelle is used extensively in classical and folk Arabic poetry to refer to the beloved woman, due to the many characteristics of elegance and grace a gazelle and a woman share, and that a man seeks in a woman. The poet uses two of the numerous names available for a gazelle in Arabic, *ghazāl* and *rīm*, to refer to his beloved woman. Pointing out the noble origin of the woman he loves, Karyū borrows an image from the desert, the gazelle's natural habitat and one with which he is very familiar. Yet his gazelle is different from the desert gazelle, as she does not forage for food to survive. He is alluding here to her noble origin.

The verb *kattastu* is not a familiar word in Algerian dialect. In Boubakeur's version we read *kāyastuh* which he translates as "to treat gently" (1990: 225). It is obvious that this is a spelling mistake where the two dots of the *yā'* were replaced by those of the *tā'*. The person who copied the poem and sent it to Hadj-Sadok remarks in a letter of December 22, 1967 on the strange nature of the verb: "unknown to me," yet his tentative explanation of it fits well the verb *kāyastuh* in Boubakeur's version. Ending his poem, Karyū engages in a dialogue with his beloved, asking her to accompany him to his new post:

راني غادي للمنيرة يا حزنني / واذا عندك نيف نديك معايا
قالت لي «لو كان ناسي يهدوني/ ما نبقا ش وراك فالبر هنايا»
نظرت لي بالعيون توادعني/ نبيكي لهواها وتبيكي لهوايا
«ابقاي على خير يا ضو اعيناي/ راه القلب معاك والجسد معايا»

Rānī ghādī lil-mnī'a yā ḥuznī / we edhā 'endik nīf niddiki m'āyā
Qālat lī law kān nāsī yehdūnī / mā nibqā sheyy warāk fil-bar hnāyā
Nazret liyya bel-'eyūn twādī'nī / nibkī lihawāhā we tibkī lihawāyā
*Bqāy 'alā khayr yā ḍaw e'nāyī / rāh el-qalb m'āk wej-jasad m'āyā*¹⁴

"I am leaving for al-Mnī'a, and I am very sad, but if you dare do it, I would take you with me."

She replied: "If my parents would allow it, I would not stay here without you."

She then looked at me, bidding me farewell with her eyes. I cried for her love and she cried for mine.

"I leave you in peace, light of my eyes, my heart is with you and only my body is with me."

The same friend who dispatched Karyū's poem to Hadj-Sadok included another one by a different poet whose name he does not mention, stating only

that he is a late nineteenth-century poet from Tajmūt, residing in Bughārī. Upon the poet's visit to his hometown he composed a few verses expressing his joy to see his beloved. Although he refers to her by the name Fatima, he nevertheless addresses her "O Gazelle" when they meet. Responding to her anger at his late arrival he says:

قلت لها يا الريم كنا في القفار / ابلادي تاجموت فالصحرا جينا

Qultilhā yar-rīm kunnā fil qfār / blādi tajmūt fiṣ-ṣaḥrā jīnā

I told her, O Gazelle, we were in the wilderness, but my hometown is Tajmūt and through the desert we came.

The poet Lighrisī, Hadj-Sadok's father-in-law, frequently uses the word 'gazelle' in referring to his beloved Zahra, whose name he also mentions openly. There is an endearing quality to the word *ghazāl* (*ghzal*) and the image it evokes, which explains its popularity in love poems. In a poem dated October 9, 1919, Lighrisī uses the phrase, *yā tarā yā ghzālī* (I wonder, O my gazelle) as a refrain,¹⁵ plays on words all derived from the verb *ghazala*:

في الغزل نتغزل معطوب/ غزل غزلي في شكر غزال

Fil-ghazal nitghazzal maṭṭūb / ghazal ghazālī fī shukr ghzāl

I celebrate love and I am hurt, my love is spun in the praise of a gazelle.

An additional pun is derived from the double meaning of the verb *ghazala* which means to spin, in both colloquial Algerian and classical Arabic. Moreover, *ghazal* also means to whirl when referring to water, evoking thus the condition of a person madly in love.

The Good Fortune of Malḥūn Poetry

Algerian folk poetry benefited from two rather unfortunate situations. On the one hand it filled a gap left by classical Arabic, which had been reduced, by colonial decree in 1938, to the status of a foreign language, while colloquial Algerian remained generally safe from censorship or outright ban. Censorship of certain popular artistic activities with an anti-colonial message was not unusual, however. The shadow theater, the Qaraqūz, was banned in 1843 (Memmi 1963: 18). On the other hand, in its efforts to achieve a deeper understanding of the native population, in order to better control it, the colonial

administration was convinced that the key to the Algerians' 'mysterious' soul was to be found in its folk poetry. A small number of French administrators dedicated themselves to the study of colloquial Arabic. Those who did, such as Emile Dermenghem, Eugène Daumas, René Basset, and C. Sonneck, came to genuinely appreciate the artistic qualities of the language used by folk poets. Daumas went so far as to declare Algerian *malhūn* superior to French poetry, which he considered to be "anxious, tormented, and whimsical," using a language that was "feverish and labored" (1853: 102). As a matter of fact, Daumas's infatuation with the *malhūn* appears to have blinded him to the irony of a situation where many of the heart-wrenching verses he enjoyed so much evoked the atrocities committed by his own country's occupation forces. Callously introducing a poem describing the conquest of Algiers, he writes: "I was quite happy to have collected the lamentations of the defeated" (115).

Ironically, however, this French interest saved an important portion of the *malhūn* repertoire, although it is almost certain that a sizable quantity of folk poetry was lost, and more continues to disappear with the deaths of authors and memorizers. Moreover, the body of poetry collected by French orientalists was not part of an organized project, with a well-defined phonetic or thematic system. There was a lack of homogeneity in the classification of Algeria's folk literary repertoire from the start, "an absolutely heterogeneous corpus which would have horrified a respected orientalist," as Fanny Colonna comments on Joseph Desparmet's efforts (Rivière 1976: 19). Moreover, without a standardized transliteration system faithfully applied by transcribers, discrepancies will continue to arise, making judgments difficult or simply incorrect. An examination of the poem by Karyū mentioned earlier, in which he bids his beloved farewell, transcribed independently by two educated Algerians, Boubakeur and HD, a friend of Hadj-Sadok, reveals significant differences. Not only are the texts of the two versions not identical but the verses do not keep the same order and Boubakeur's poem is longer than HD's, with an additional three verses. The last hemistich in HD's version reads:

Rāh el-qalb m^cāk wej-jasad m^cāyā راه القلب معاك والجسد معايا

My heart is with you and only my body is with me.

Boubakeur's (1990: 256) version reads:

Rāh el-qalb m^cāk mā huwāsh m^cāyā راه القلب معاك ما هواش معايا

My heart is with you and not with me.

Furthermore, differences between dialects in the same country create variations in pronunciation that account for discrepancies between different versions of the same poem. Boubakeur points out a “serious divergence” (1990: 51) between his version of Muḥammad bin Bilkhayr’s (1835?–1905) love poems and those collected by Boualem Bessaïh in *Etendard interdit* (1976). Those differences may be due to the fact that the two authors collected the poems from different reciters.

Fighting Oblivion

Folk poets resorted to a system aimed at securing some degree of recognition, incorporating their names at the end of a poem, as part of the text. Some even included their city of origin and the date of their composition. For example, °Abd al-Qādir al-Wahrānī, whose poem fascinated Daumas, concluded his verses with the following signature:

يا غافر الذنب اغفر لى قالها/واغفر ذنوب عبد القادر مسكين

Yā ghāfer edh-dhanb eghfer lilli qālḥā / weghfer dhunūb °Abd el-Qāder meskīn

O You Who forgives sins, forgive this author, forgive poor °Abd al-Qādir’s sins (Yelles and al-Ḥifnāwī 1975: 39).

One of the few women folk poets concluded her poem thus:

فاطمة الشريف المغبونة/من فراق ولد العباسي

Fāṭma esh-shrīf el-maghbūna / min frāg weld el-°Abbāsī

Fāṭma al-Sharīf is saddened by her separation from the son of al-°Abbāsī (99).

Another poet, Mīdūnī al-Ḥājī Qwaydar bin Ṭarība, mentions both his name and the date of his composition:

تورخ ميدوني ذا الكلام يوم ان جاب/يا من تفهم ترشامة
عام الف وثلاثمئة زيد له حساب/اربعين السبعة عامة

*Tuwarrah Mīdūnī dhal-kalām yōm en jāb / yā man tifham tershāma
°Ām alf we thlāthmiyya zīd luh ḥsāb / arb°in es-sab°a °āmah*

The year these words were composed, oh you who understands his words

The year one thousand three hundred, add to it forty seven, this is the year¹⁶ (87).

Another poet stressed the patriotic character of his poetry:

ولد الماحي جاب الاوزنا/وعلى وطنه جاب ذو الاشعار

Weld el-māhī jāb el-awznā / we ʿalā watanu jāb dhul-ashʿār

The son of Māhī found the rhyme and wrote poetry about his country (141).

One can read in this verbal signature of the folk poets a certain anguish as a result of oral transmission, which rendered their compositions extremely vulnerable and subject to quick extinction. Orally transmitted texts are like words written in the wind and trusted to the least dependable of the human senses, memory. An embedded poetic signature would act as a protective talisman, a guarantor of survival. Whatever reasons dictated the practice, this ingenious method is quite effective since the name would be memorized as part of the verse. With their names at the ends of their poems, the poets who do not achieve fame can at least receive recognition. Very few poets were the authors of published collections. The ones known to us are: Saʿīd al-Mindāsī (Bakūsha n.d.), Mohand ou Mhand (Mammeri 1969; Feraoun 1960), and Muḥammad Bilkhayr (Bessaïh 1976). The last poet is one of three to whom Boubakeur (1990) devoted a book titled *Trois poètes algériens de langue arabe populaire* (1990), the two others being ʿAbdallah bin Karyū and Muḥammad Bayṭār.

Ahmed Tahar provided an explanation for the paucity of published collections: “not only because [the poet] destined them to be sung rather than read, but possibly also because many among them exalted feelings and expressed dreams incompatible with the strict requirements of Islamic orthodoxy” (1975: 65). While this explanation has its merits, it is not fully justified when we consider the survival, and even the resurgence, of the daring *rāy* genre (songs with explicit content, freely expressing an opinion—*rāy* means ‘opinion,’ from *ra’y* in classical Arabic), as well as the abundance of love songs heard on the radio and some of the love folk poems that were printed in the few published collections. The dearth of published poems appears to have resulted rather from the great difficulty researchers encounter in the documentation of deceased poets and the gathering of their unpublished poems. In the introduction to his book on Saʿīd al-Mindāsī, Bakūsha (n.d.) lamented people’s reluctance to contribute to his efforts to collect this poetry.

Poetic Folk Genres

Ḥawfī and Buqālā: The Voices of Women

Both *ḥawfī* and *buqālā* are purely feminine poetic genres, transmitted orally. Though their origin is unknown, they are urban forms and current mainly in traditional cities. They are identified with a social game involving women only. The *ḥawfī* is sung while women play on a swing, whereas the *buqālā*, as explained earlier (chapter one), is a social game, played at home.

Rāy: The Revival

It is impossible to survey the history of Algerian folk poetry without mentioning *rāy*, not merely because it is a form of folk poetry primarily sung, but also due to its phenomenal worldwide popularity, heard either in live performances or recorded. Though *rāy* became known to the world in the mid-1980s, it is an old genre that originated in western Algeria, in the Oran region, soon after the French occupation. It would be more accurate in this case to speak of its revival.¹⁷

A subtle rivalry exists between *rāy* and the *malḥūn*, dating back to the colonial period, at times acquiring political significance. When *rāy* displaced the *malḥūn*, the poets of the *malḥūn* retaliated by accusing *rāy* singers of being the instruments of colonial power. *Rāy* lacks refined language and social distinction—its first singers were shepherds and prostitutes—but it compensates for this in humor and camouflaged language (Virolle-Souibès 1989). It carries a triviality that appeals to youth and provides entertainment for private and public parties.

At its origin, *rāy* was primarily sung by women, giving them a voice at a time when they were almost absent from the world of the *malḥūn*, except as subjects of the numerous love and erotic poems in that repertoire.¹⁸

Themes of Algerian Folk Poetry

Folk poetry held a central place in the life of the Algerian people prior to the arrival of the French in 1830. It thus seems normal for the major events that changed the course of the history of the country to become the subject of choice for Algerian poets. The landing of the French army was explained as a response to the conduct of the Algerian Dey, who struck the French ambassador Pierre Duval with a fan and refused to apologize for his action. The campaign, which according to historians was undertaken to distract the attention of the French from the domestic turmoil of the government of Charles X, infuriated the people, who became obsessed with it. Folk poets, acting as the media of the time, chronicled the events and painted the emotions that surrounded them rather faithfully.

Composed parallel to major historical events, Algerian folk poetry can be divided thematically into three major phases from 1830 to the end of the colonial period, in 1962. The choice of the year 1830 is primarily to confine this study to the colonial period and in no way indicates that folk poetry did not exist prior to the French conquest.

The First Phase

The first poems to be composed were those of lamentation and despair. They overwhelmingly expressed the disappointment of the Algerians in the military capabilities of Husayn Dey, the ruler at the time. His inability to repel the invaders and defeat their armies greatly dismayed the population. In his elegy of the city of Algiers, the poet °Abd al-Qādir al-Wahrānī summed up the feelings of the majority of the people:

لاغا ابراهيم ركب وفزع في شمالها/والباي والخليفة خذوا اليمين

Laghā Brāhim rkeb we fza° fī shmālḥā / wel-Bāy wel-Khlifa khadhul-yamīn

Agha Ibrahim mounted his horse and went left, scared, while the Bey and the Caliph went right (Yelles and al-Ḥifnāwī 1975: 36).

This loss of faith in the ruling power and its failure to protect and defend its citizens was matched by a similar sentiment vis-à-vis the failed spiritual power of the *wālīs* (holy men). In the eyes of the people the *wālīs* had failed to ward off the infidels and destroy them militarily. While the Algerians did not go so far as to question their Islamic faith, their spiritual traditions received a serious jolt as they turned to more tangible forms of worship, seeking strength, explanations, and help from marabouts and *ṭulbā* (singular: *ṭālib*, students involved in Islamic studies). Antiquated superstitious practices were soon again in vogue, the belief in the supernatural power of talismans and amulets grew, and semi-legendary holy men such as the expected Mahdi were invoked to rescue the conquered country and its people.

The religious brotherhoods had an immense influence on the people, easily fanning the fires of opposition by stressing the immorality of the French and their lack of respect for Islam. The colonial administration counteracted, eagerly striving to destroy the brotherhoods, which posed a serious threat to their authority (Depont and Coppolani 1897).

Similar feelings of disappointment in the spiritual leaders were echoed by Berber poets. The gravity of events and the country's inability to stop the invading army caused some poets to believe in divine punishment. They denounced the cooperation of those in positions of authority with the coloniz-

ers and considered them collaborators and traitors. French military superiority was a source of despair and became a major theme in the poetry of the time (Chaker 1989). Such concerns were the primary preoccupation of Maghribi folk poetry, whether in *malhūn*, *zajal*, or *malzūma*, as *zajal* poetry is called in Tunisia (Sraieb 1989: 144). The most famous poet of this trend was the Egyptian-born Tunisian Bayram al-Tūnisi.

The predominance of national themes did not preclude the circulation, or the popularity of love poems as the romantic repertoire of ʿAbdallah bin Karyū (1869–1921) attests. The poet Muḥammad Bilkhayr (1835–1905), exiled to Corsica for his participation in the Awlād Sidī Shaykh revolt of 1864–65, had an extensive repertoire of love poems. The humiliation of defeat inspired a poetry of nostalgia and reflections on God’s power over a person’s life:

الدنيا في الزمان الاول/قالوا ترئس واحد واتذل ألفين
التي يدبر الخير ما يجمّل/موت الحرمة ولا تمر ميد الحيين
اعلام الترك كان صايل/باعوا الاسلام للنصارى في البرين

Ed-dunyā fiz-zamān el-awwal / qālū trayyes wāhed wıtdhil alfayn
Ellı yedır el-khayr mā yıjammel / mōt el-ḥurma walā tmarmīd el-
ḥayyın
ʿElām et-turk kân şāyel / bāʿul-islām lın-naşārā fıl-barrayn

Since time immemorial, life raises some and lowers others;
He who does good should not boast about it, it is better to die than
lead a life of humiliation;
The Turkish flag fluttered high, but the Turks betrayed Islam, selling
it to the Christians on two continents (Bessaïh 1976: 119).

Bilkhayr wrote long, philosophical soliloquies reflecting on life, friendship, and faithfulness in an effort to understand the unprovoked catastrophe that had befallen his people (Tahar 1975: 74–83).

The Second Phase

The second phase started roughly around the beginning of the twentieth century, as the Algerians lost hope of ever defeating the colonizer by means of an armed uprising. Their attitude was marked by dreams about France’s defeat, to be achieved by legendary heroes such as ʿAntar and religious figures, primarily Caliph ʿAlī, the fourth of the Khulafā Rāshidūn (rightly guided caliphs) who ruled over the Islamic nation after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad in 632. This period is equally rich in poetry evoking legendary figures from the epic of the Banī Hilāl. This nostalgic look back at a glorious

past, though fictional, is the natural reaction of a people threatened by a superior power, as has been often observed (Le Goff 1992: 16). In other words, it is a sign of defeat, since what cannot be achieved in real life is lived through imagination. The long French occupation and the defeat of popular uprisings plunged the population into a state of helplessness. Only the memory of legendary and fictional heroes would maintain their faith and sustain them in the face of adversity.

The sense of pride, *nif*, the concept of honor dear to both Arabs and Berbers, was blemished. Helpless and hopeless, some members of the population adopted drastic measures to escape the abuses of the occupier. There were both collective and individual migrations to neighboring countries. The Berber poet Mohand ou Mhand (1848–1906) opted for a self-imposed exile rather than a life of humiliation under French occupation, despite the suffering this life brought him. The following poem is written originally in Berber:

*Je me suis exilé en terre étrangère
Clercs pleurez-vous
Esprits qui saisissez tout.*

I am exiled in a foreign land;
Weep, writers,
You alone can understand (Mammeri 1969: 81).

The majority of collective migrations occurred on the eve of the First World War, when Algerians were called upon to enlist in the ranks of the French army. After their initial efforts to escape conscription by hiding in the mountains failed, most of the young men who fled were found and forced to join the French army against their will.

The evocation of a glorious Arab–Islamic past by Algerian folk poets was part of their own search for a glimmer of hope. Only by understanding the events of history that had befallen their country could they help their audiences achieve some degree of solace. In order to cement the ranks of a multi-ethnic population whose divisions the colonial power was cleverly exploiting, some poets stressed the shared fate of Arabs and Berbers under colonial rule. ‘Abd al-Salām bin Aḥmad al-Baqqāl portrays the equal victimization of the two ethnic groups that occurred in spite of the colonizer’s efforts to rally the Berbers to their side. The image used is evocative of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves:

عربي وقبايلي حصلنا فالزيار/علينا ذا الزمان جوار

‘*Arbī we qbāyīlī ḥṣalnā fiz-zyār / ‘alaynā dha ez-zmān jwār*

Arab and Kabyle, we are stuck together in jars;
Time has been unfair to us (Yelles and al-Ḥifnāwī 1975: 91).

The evocation of a shared Islamic faith and its history was yet another bond used to tighten the ranks and consolidate the unity of the nation vis-à-vis the colonial administration. Moreover, it served to put a lid on the animosity that marked the relations between the two communities, which the colonial power used to its advantage. In light of this situation, the tendency of the administration to identify the Algerians merely by their faith—‘les Musulmans’—provided a common bond that united the various ethnic groups.

The ordeal of the Algerians was aggravated by the events of the First World War and their repercussion on their lives. Enlisted by force, the men found themselves enemies to a Muslim country, Turkey, fighting for the freedom of other nations, while their own country was colonized. Poet-soldiers composed poems in which they wondered about their role in the war and the dangers that awaited them on the battlefield. A conscript from western Algeria bids farewell to his city al-Aṣṣnām, on the eve of his departure with other enlisted men for Algiers:

ابقاي بالسلامة يا لصناب منا/ وهذا حد الفراق منك صدينا
الجلعة جاء والفرقة نادات/ والوقت جات للذراير يدونا
كجا مرو صغير رافد خط المير/ كجا جادرمي مثقل سلسلنا
سلسلنا زوج زوج غير العين تموج/ وعلى لصناب في البلاصة خضانا

*Ibqāy bislāma yā liṣnāb minnā / we hādhā ḥad el-frāq minnek ṣadīnā
el-jilgha jā' wel-furqa nādāt / wel-waqt jā' lidzāyer yeddūnā
kijā marw ṣghīr rāfed khaṭ el-mīr / ki jā jandarmī mithqal salsalnā
salsalnā zūj zūj, ghayr el-ʿayn tmūj / we ʿalā liṣnāb fil-blāṣa khadānā*¹⁹

Rest in peace, O al-Aṣṣnām, it is time to be separated from you;
The ordeal has arrived and the time of separation calls, it is time for
us to be taken to Algiers;
A young man came, carrying a document signed by the mayor, then
came an armed gendarme to chain us;
He chained us two by two, only our eyes could look in all directions,
and to the main square of al-Aṣṣnām he led us (from Hadj-Sadok's
collection).

The powerful image reveals the contempt the French had for the Algerians. Those young men risking their lives for a war that did not concern them were led to the train like criminals, a far cry from the treatment enlisted men usually receive.

The Third Phase

The third phase, which began in the period between the two world wars, was a time of accountability, an effort on the part of the Algerians to assume responsibility for their past mistakes. As the colonial administration celebrated the centenary of its conquest of Algeria, as well as the success of its "mission civilisatrice," the tone of the folk poets changed, becoming self-critical, searching for a new direction. A more realistic outlook on life characterized the language of written and oral literature. Blame abounded, and the marabouts received the brunt of the people's jibes. The interference of the colonial administration in the religious affairs of the country, destroying the religious brotherhoods and appointing imams in what became known as official mosques led to the existence of a line of official religious clerics who were at odds with the independent imams, strongly backed by the Association of Muslim ^cUlama. Its active members subjected the official imams to mockery and ridicule, particularly in short stories.²⁰ Poets were preoccupied with a comparative assessment of their people, evaluating their weaknesses in relation to the superiority of the French, in the hope of motivating them to improve their standard of living and strive for a better life.

A very powerful though angry message was conveyed by Mūsā bin al-Milyānī al-Aḥmadī, a contemporary of Bin al-Ṭayyib ^cAlilī, in *Ṣarkhat muṣliḥ* ('The outcry of a reformer,' 1945–46). Unlike ^cAlilī, al-Aḥmadī was educated and viewed the situation in his country in a different light. His poem (from Hadj-Sadok's private collection) is structured as a dialogue between the poet and the Algerian people, where the poet asks a series of questions, each ending with the imperative verb, "*fiqū, fiqū*" ('wake up, wake up'). Recalling the role of a chorus in a Greek tragedy, the people end their response with a question that does not change throughout the poem, "*bāsh nfiqū?*" ('How can we wake up?'). The first verse consists solely of an order to awaken, repeated eight times in the two hemistichs, creating a powerful dramatic effect, setting the tone for the patronizing words to follow. After the fourth verse, however, the poet does not even give the people a chance to respond. From then on, the dialogue turns into a monologue, where the poet expresses his dismay at his compatriots' helplessness and their frustrating excuses:

اتحدوا كونوا رجال/وانتبهوا راعوا الاحوال/راكم ضيعتوا الاموال/فيقوا فيقوا!
فيقوا فيقوا ما تناموش/هذا الفعل ما منوش/يا اللي رقدتوا ما فطنتوش/فيقوا فيقوا!
كثرتوا كي اولاد السمانة/وتقعدتوا لخلا للهانة/القهاوي منكم مليانة/فيقوا فيقوا!

*Ittiḥdū kūnū rjāl / wentibhū rā^cul aḥwāl / rākum ḍayya^ctul-amwāl /
fiqū, fiqū!*
*Fiqū, fiqū mā tnāmūsh / ḥādhāl-fi^cl mā minnūsh / yallī raqadtū mā
fṭinūsh / fiqū, fiqū!*

*Kthertū kī wlād es-sammāna / we q^cadtū likhlā lilhāna / el-qhāwī
minkum malyāna / fiqū, fiqū!*

Unite and be men, pay attention to your condition, you have squandered your fortunes, wake up, wake up!

Wake up, wake up, do not sleep, this will get you nowhere, you who slept and did not notice, wake up, wake up!

You multiplied like quail chicks, you accepted humiliation, you filled the cafés, wake up, wake up!

Once he is through listing the Algerians' responsibility in their own downfall, the poet gives them this advice:

خَلِّوْا البطلة وارواحو/للخدمة، بها ترتاحو/يا خوتي الاوقات كساحو/فيقوا فيقوا!
يخي راعوا للجيران كيفاش تعمّر الاوطان/وعزیزه في كل مكان/ فيقوا فيقوا!

*Khalli w el-buṭla werwāḥū / lil-khidma, bihā tertāḥū / yā khūtī el-
awqāt kisāḥū / fiqū, fiqū!*

*Yakhī rā^cū lil-jirān / kifāsh t^cammer el-awṭān / we ^caziza fī kul
makān / fiqū, fiqū!*

End idleness and come to work, it will do you good, brothers, times are hard, wake up, wake up!

Brothers! Watch the neighbors, how they build their nation, they are loved everywhere, wake up, wake up!

The neighbors in question here are the French as well as those closer to the Algerians, the *colons*, immigrants from various European countries who settled in Algeria after 1830. The poet follows this recommendation, as if to be more convincing, with a list of French achievements in the form of technological inventions:

صنعوا طيارات وطاروا/وببَابر في البحار ساروا/من كل عزيز يختاروا/فيقوا فيقوا!
أدخل للسنيمه شوف/ماذا فيها من الحروف/كل عجب فيها مكشوف/ فيقوا فيقوا!
والتأساف اخباره جات/تحملها بعض الموجات/يالها من مرسلات!/ فيقوا فيقوا!

*Šana^cū ṭayyārāt we ṭārū / we bibbāber fil-bḥār sārū / min kul ^caziz
yekhtārū / fiqū, fiqū!*

*Udkhul lis-senima shūf / mādhā fihā min liḥrūf / kul ^cajab fihā mak-
shūf / fiqū, fiqū!*

*Wit-teseḥ akhbārū jāṭ / tiḥmilḥā ba^cd el-mūjāt / yā lahā min mursilāt!
/ fiqū, fiqū!*

They invented planes and flew, they sailed boats in the sea, they
 chose the best there is, wake up, wake up!
 Enter the movie house, see what culture it presents, marvels of all
 kinds are seen, wake up, wake up!
 The TSF [radio] brings the news, carried by sound waves, what trans-
 mitters they are! wake up, wake up!

Al-Aḥmadī proceeds to explain the reasons for his people's backwardness:

استسلمنا للكهان/استسلمنا لحزب الجان/سلم تسلّم يافلان/ فيقوا فيقوا!
 عشنا رهن الخرافات/وتركنا اسباب الحياة/يا حسراه على ما فات!/ فيقوا فيقوا!

Istaslamnā lil-kuhhān / istaslamnā liḥizb el-jān / sallem teslam yā flān
/ fiqū, fiqū!
 ‘Eshnā rahn el-khurafāt / we taraknā asbāb el-ḥayāt / yā ḥasrāh ‘alā
 mā fāt / fiqū, fiqū!

We gave in to soothsayers, and succumbed to the demon's followers,
 we were told, “Submit and be saved.” Wake up, wake up!
 We lived at the mercy of superstitions, we failed to provide for life,
 alas for the time lost! Wake up, wake up!

The poet does provide some hope, with a strong warning to his people:
 though they are “all Adam's heirs” and have a right to the goods of the earth,
 they must strive hard to receive their share:

لكن للميراث اسباب/كيما جاتنا في الكتاب/واللي قامت به ما خاب/ فيقوا فيقوا!
 شرط الورث اسمع نريك/الحياة مع التحريك/والحرية افهم نعطيك/ فيقوا فيقوا!

Lāken lil-mirāth asbāb / kimā jātnā fi liktāb / welli qāmet bih mā
khāb / fiqū, fiqū!
 Sharṭ el-werth isma^c nrīk / el-ḥayā ma^cit-taḥrīk / wel-hurriyya ifham
 na^cṭīk / fiqū, fiqū!

There are conditions for inheritance, as mentioned in the Book [the
 Qur'ān], rewarded are the faithful, wake up, wake up!
 Let me tell you the conditions for inheritance: an active life, this is
 what will set you free, wake up, wake up!

While al-Aḥmadī's goals are understandable, his method shows no con-
 sideration for his people's plight and little empathy for their suffering.
 Contrary to ‘Alilī, he is reprimanding rather than sympathetic, and appears

quite removed from the harsh realities of his compatriots' daily battle. His approach is that of a self-righteous bourgeois, as he remains external to the blame and the mistakes committed by the people. His attitude echoes that of another literary folk poet, Bayram al-Tūnisi, who in his *zajal* blames the Tunisians for their own plight, accusing them of being too submissive (Booth 1994: 164). Al-Aḥmadi's cultural myopia is further confirmed by the findings of a French research team headed by Bourdieu (1963), which explains how Algerians were trapped on the horns of a dilemma: education or survival. Forced to work at an early age, they were unable to pursue their education to a point that would have helped them acquire a skill or a profession needed to reach a degree of financial comfort. Most accepted their ill fate as one of their own making, blaming themselves for their poverty. Bourdieu explains their attitudes thus: "They tend to attribute their shortcomings to their personal deficiencies rather than to the deficiencies of existing conditions" (1963: 308).

The Second World War renewed the dilemma of the enlisted Algerians. The war experience embittered them as they endured discrimination in the ranks of the French army, even those who, like Ferhat Abbas, were educated and promoted the discourse of assimilation for integration into the French community (Abbas 1962). Fighting meant separation from the homeland and loved ones and confronting the horrors of war. In *Hawl el-kārant* ('Terror of the forties'; Hadj-Sadok 1973: 26), the poet Muḥammad wild Qwaydar details his experience in a dangerous war that he survived, summarized in this verse:

هذا الهول يشيب إلي حضروا فيه/واذا كدبت سوك إلي كانوا ثم

*Hdhāl-hawl yeshayyeb illi ḥaḍrū fih / we edhā kaddabt sawwel elli
kānū tham*

This terror turned the fighter's hair gray, if you do not believe me ask those who were there.

The Sétif Massacres: A Turning Point in Algeria's History

The language of poetry hardened after the massacres of 1945 at Sétif in eastern Algeria. The celebrations organized by the Algerians on May 8 to mark the end of the war were marred by the shooting to death of a young Algerian carrying Algeria's banned green and white flag. The event triggered riots during which about one hundred *colons* were killed. The colonial adminis-

tration retaliated, giving carte blanche to the French civilians to take their revenge, while the French army bombarded Algerian towns and villages from the sky and the sea. Figures differ as to the number of Algerian civilians killed: the Algerian sources state that up to 45,000 were killed; the French put the number at 15,000.

Hopes for a peaceful solution to the Algerian conflict ended with what is commonly known as the Sétif massacres. The brutality of the French retaliation by both the army and the civilian population shocked the Algerians and threatened chances for future coexistence. The decision to resort to armed resistance to end French occupation was the direct result of the bloody events of 1945. The Algerians who fought in the ranks of the French armies in two world wars, for the preservation of 'world freedom and democracy,' lost faith in the empty promises for equality made by the colonial administration.

The bloody events of Sétif are described in a poem by Shaykh Bilkhayr wild Farḥāt:

السينغال ايطير كالمجنون/حرقوا «بالبونبات» كم من ديس
«قالمة» ثم الدم عاد عيون/ثاني «سوق اهراس» عاد اعفيس
نبتوا اتموت من العرب مليون/والباقيين ادوهم امحابيس

Es-seneghāl yeṭir kilmajnūn / ḥaraqū bilbonbāt kam min dīs
Gelma tham ed-dam ʿād ʿiyūn / thānī Sūq Ahrās ʿād eʿfīs
Nibghū tmūt min el-ʿarab milyōn / wel-bāqyīn iddūhom mḥābīs

The Senegalese were moving like mad, burning the vegetation with bombs;

In Gelma, blood flowed like springs, and Suq Ahras, too, was destroyed;

“We want one million Arabs to die,” [said the French], “and we will take the rest prisoners” (Yelles and al-Ḥifnāwī 1975: 118).

The use of Senegalese soldiers enrolled in the French army in the forefront of the repression campaign against the Algerian population was significant. It was a movement of the oppressed oppressing other oppressed, an indication, writes Fanon, that “there was no place for a universalization of the process” (1952: 84). Bilkhayr reveals the change of heart that took place after the events of 1945, describing in the same poem people’s hope in l’Etoile Nord Africaine, an organization founded in Paris in 1925 by ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Qādir, then presided over by the Algerian Miṣālī al-Ḥajj from 1926 until its dissolution in 1937. It was a radical communist organization around which rallied the majority of Maghribi workers living in France.

After more than a century of French occupation, reality weighed heavily on the people. The deterioration of living conditions, swelling rural emigration to urban areas, empty promises of self-determination, and the moral dejection of the Algerians left no room for compromise. It was in this ambiance that Bin al-Ṭayyib °Alilī lived, one of many Algerians existing below the poverty line. A true image of destitution can be seen in the poem °Alilī addressed to his benefactor, Hadj-Sadok. He makes a direct plea for help in these verses:

ألي ما عنده صحة ولا يكسب مال/حد ما يشوف ليه بغير النافع
اعطاك ربي على شوفت الانجال/اتكرم على ألي دونك ضائع

Illī mā °endu ṣiḥḥa walā yeksab māl / ḥad mā yeshūf lih bighayr en-nāfi°

A°āk Rabbī °alā shūft el-anjāl / etkarram °alā elli dūnak ḍāye°

He who is not healthy and has no income, no one cares for him;
God granted you a son, be generous to him who is lost without you.

أنا حي في الدنيا مسجون/استوحيت واتعروا اكتافي

Anā ḥay fid-dunyā masjūn / estawḥayt we t°arrū ktāfi

I am alive, but a prisoner in the world, I am fearful and my shoulders
are bare.

It is a different °Alilī that is revealed in these verses, depressed and mournful, with none of the playfulness we see in his other poems. Yet if this proud man requests aid so openly, it is an indication of the degree of desperation he had reached in the late 1940s.

Colonized Mentalities

The colonial administration in Algeria, with a well-planned policy of cultural assimilation, managed to acquire supporters, not least of them the marabouts and many French-educated intellectuals. It was never the intention of the colonizer, however, to provide French education to the whole population—the *colons* were always opposed to any policy that would give the native population advantages similar to theirs. They formed a powerful lobby and succeeded in defeating the rare policies aimed at improving the conditions of the Algerians. The best efforts were those of Governor General

Viollette (1925–27), who was eager to correct the injustices committed against the native population.

Any cultural rapprochement was, therefore, limited in scope and benefited only a few. It aimed primarily at winning over Algerians to serve as advocates for the French ideals of the 1798 Revolution: Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. Qualitatively, cultural assimilation achieved considerable success, as many Algerians fell under the spell of France's technological advances and its rich culture. The founding of the Association of Muslim 'Ulama in 1931 was partially in response to this policy, in order to counteract the impact of French education on the Muslim youth. Algerian intellectuals experienced the dilemma as well and were torn between their allegiance to their culture and religion and their admiration for the culture of the colonizer. The shock of the cultural confrontation was dramatized in the first novels published: Mammeri, *La colline oubliée* (1952); Dib, *Un été africain* (1959); Djébar, *La soif* (1957); and Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* (1953).

Qaddūr al-Darqāwī, a poet and 'Alilī's contemporary, is a good example of a colonized mentality. He was the Qā'id (chief) of the town of Hammām Righā, a popular spa during the period. His poems, which revolved around the events of the Second World War, reveal a feeling of inferiority vis-à-vis the colonial authority and gratitude for the slightest manifestation of kindness on their part. These poems, from Hadj-Sadok's collection, express total support for the Allies. The poet is not aware of the irony of the situation as he speaks approvingly of the punishment inflicted on the German and Italian invaders, while his country was colonized:

ربي ذل اللي عالتأس اتعدى/ ما نفعت قوة ولا تنظام سلام

Rabbī dhal elli 'an-nās et'addā / mā nif'et quwwa walā tinzām slāh

God humiliated the invaders, neither strength nor military organization were of use to them.

He praises the Allied countries, declaring that their enemies are his enemies, and even rejoices at the use of the atomic bomb against Japan:

جنرال إللي بقى عنا يَفْدَا/ اتفقت عنو الامه لا تسراح
هو واستالين وترومان جبدة/ لحقهم شرشيل ثاني ناس ملاح
داروا خصلة في إيامات الشدة/ لا تومي في السر على العديان إتلاح.

Jenerāl elli bqā 'annā yufdā / ettafqat 'annul-umma lā tesrāh
Huwa we stālīn we trūman jibda / liḥeqhum shershil thānī nās mlāh
Dārū khuṣla fī eyyāmāt esh-shidda / latomī fis-sirr 'alal-'edyān etlāh

The general who remained with us is liked by all;
 He and Stalin and Truman are together, they were joined by
 Churchill, a good man too;
 They did well during the difficult times, secretly throwing the atomic
 bomb on our enemies.

The general in question is General de Gaulle, who played a decisive role in Algeria's future, advancing the concept of self-determination that led to Algeria's independence. Referring to him as a person liked by all is an uncanny premonition of the years to come.

The people who suffered great hardships and unbearable famines during the Second World War would naturally look forward to its end, a sentiment expressed in another of al-Darqāwī's poems. What seems surprising, however, is the failure of the poet to establish the slightest correlation between the fate of the countries invaded by the Axis and his own, rejoicing at the victories of the Allies like any Frenchman. His attitude reflects a colonized mentality, an aspect of the success of the French cultural mission in obliterating the minds of the colonized. In another unpublished poem from Hadj-Sadok's collection he expresses satisfaction with his condition, having all he needs: "Ḥattā shī mā khaṣnā kāmel matmūm"—*There is nothing we need, we have everything.*

Al-Aḥmadī too fits the profile of the colonized intellectual living between two worlds and ill at ease in both. He feels culturally equal to the colonizer, but fails to reap the benefits of his position, as some members of his society—represented by the merchants in his poem *ṣūra min ṣuwar al-mujtamaʿ al-jazāʿirī bi-l-ḥarb al-ʿālamīyya al-thāniya* ('An image of the Algerian society during the Second World War')—do not treat him with the respect and consideration they have for the *colons*. Hurt by their attitude, al-Aḥmadī launches a virulent diatribe against the cheating merchants, those "traitors of Islam" who respect only Europeans. He summarizes their attitude in this verse:

يبيعوا للرومي بالطاكس/ والعربي يعطوه الناقص/ بالسوم المرفوع القارص/
 يخونوا والعين تشوف.

Yebīʿū lir-rūmī bit-ṭākes / wel-ʿarabī yaʿṭūh en-nāqeṣ / bis-sōm el-marfūʿ el-qāreṣ / yekhūnū wel-ʿayn tshūf

They sell to the European according to the tax, but cheat in the scale
 with the Arab, sell to him at a high price, and defraud him while
 he's watching.

Once done with them, he turns his pen against a young Algerian, Shantūf, taunting him for his Westernized appearance:

يحسب روجه سيفيلزي/كيف قباح ودار فريزي/ويقولك أنا يا عزيزي/نعرفها من فاس
لسوف
يحسبك روجه كيفاش/كي نحى الجبه والشاش/والترقي بالقماش/والزي الباهي المتحوف
والبردوسو والكبوط/على البرنوس اذاو القوط/وتقدم لابسه شوط/سيدك الفحل سي
شنتوف

*Yehseb rōho sivilizi / kif qbāh we dār frizi / we yequllak anā yā
‘azīzi / ni‘rafhā min fās lsūf
Yehsiblak rōho kifāsh / kī nahhā el-jubba wish-shāsh / witraqqā
bilqmāsh / wizzay el-bāhī el-mathūf
Wil pardesū wil-kabūt / ‘alal barnūs eddāw el-fūt / we tqaddam
lābishum shawt / sīdak el-faḥl sī shantūf*

He thinks he is civilized, as he turns ugly with frizzy hair, he tells
you: I, my dear, know it [the land], from Fez to Sūf;

He thinks himself somebody, because he removed the *jibba* [long,
sleeveless blouse worn by men] and the *shash* [muslin turban
worn by men];

He wears fine textiles and an elegant costume;

The vest and coat won the vote over the *burnūs* [traditional Algerian
cape worn by men], he moves ahead, wearing the new clothes,
strong and manly Sī Shantūf.

Al-Aḥmadi's diatribe in *Šūra min šuwar* is in sharp contrast to his didactic tone in *Šarkhat Mušliḥ*. His anger is felt between the lines, through the curt, fast sentences and bitter sarcasm that characterize the poem.

Reflecting on conditions of life in independent Algeria, Bourdieu alluded to serious contradictions that might result from the colonial policy. His pre-scient words read as follows: "In any case, the conditions that the colonial system left behind, a sort of a Djeha's nail,²¹ that were legally covered up during the war, can be overcome only if confronted. They must be fought against in the open" (1963: 389).

The subtle and more obvious growing pains that Algeria faced following the end of the war of liberation in 1962 revealed the depth and degree of the colonial policy's negative impact on people's mind sets. The long and arduous efforts exerted by the French throughout their rule in Algeria had altered a whole population's self-concept. Whereas the French failed to win the Algerians' love, they did manage to condition their thinking as well as change their view of themselves. Only a person with a colonized mentality would concede to describing himself the way an unemployed construction worker from Saida did. In an interview with Bourdieu he said: "We live in a time of progress. Everything is done and accomplished through education. If I were

educated, I would not live in these conditions. I am nothing more than an ass” (1963: 308). While the worker’s words uttered during the last years of French colonial rule are distressing, more astounding are expressions of nostalgia for the colonial days heard since independence in Algeria from those frustrated with their country’s bureaucracy.

The Mturnī

In the early decades of the French conquest of Algeria, replacing traditional Algerian clothes with Western costumes was viewed by many as an act of betrayal. Moreover, those who associated themselves with the French administration were described as *mturnīs*, from the French verb *tourner* (to turn); the French saying “retourner sa veste” (“turncoat”) implies a change of a person’s allegiance. This explains al-Aḥmadī’s anger at Shantūf and, as a member of the Association, he must have felt the need to back their efforts aiming at the recuperation of the Algerian youth who fell victim to the spell of French culture.

The same concept of shifting allegiance and the ensuing regret are dramatized in an Algerian proverb that states:

يا نوار اللوز، يا نوار اللوز يا ألي غريت بي
اشتريت البلوز وبعث الجلابية

Yā nuwwār el-lōz, yā nuwwār el-lōz, yalli gharrayt biyya
Eshtarayt el-blūz we biʿt el-jalabiyya

O almond blossom, O almond blossom, you who deceived me,
I bought a blouse and sold the *djellaba* [traditional long dress].

The almond blossom serves the meaning in this proverb quite efficiently. Its multiple connotations connect it to Western culture and its attributes: its pastel colors, the season of its bloom, and its natural beauty are characteristics that explain its appeal. In the Algerian countryside the rows of almond trees in bloom form a fascinating sight in spring.

Muḥammad bin al-Ṭayyib ʿAlili lived in the midst of this political and cultural turmoil, which is reflected in his poetry. Not surprisingly, given his financial and health difficulties, his outlook on his surroundings is not that of a romantic. The next chapter provides a portrait of the man, in spite of serious gaps in his biography—in folk studies, this comes with the territory.

Three

Muḥammad bin al-Ṭayyib ʿAlīlī: A Man for All Seasons

The Man

Muḥammad bin al-Ṭayyib ʿAlīlī, known also as Mūḥā, was a folk poet born in Duperré, present-day ʿAyn al-Difla, Algeria. He was a farmer, employed as *khammās*, a hired hand, farming and receiving one-fifth of the product of the land. Since this was usually a meager income, a *khammās* was generally poor, and ʿAlīlī was no exception. He lived in a *gurbī*, a house built from straw and mud, common in the Algerian countryside. ʿAlīlī was married and had children. Like most folk poets, little else is known about him and his family.

Duperré was named after a general who had participated in the conquest of Algeria. It was established for settlement purposes on a plain adjacent to the River Shlif and most of its inhabitants were *colons* from various European countries: France, Italy, Spain, and Malta. There was also an Algerian Jewish community living in the village and involved in trade. The native Algerian population was very small in size and extremely marginalized, some of its members working as clerks in the offices of indigenous affairs, and a few involved in the grain trade.

Duperré was part of the Roman Empire in ancient times, and still has the ruins of a Roman fort called Oppidum Novum. When the Arabs landed in Algeria they built a town nearby, which they named al-Khaḍrā ('the Green'), but this was wiped out in the eleventh century with the arrival of the Banū Hilāl tribes.²² The name al-Khaḍrā now designates a meadow in the proximity of ʿAyn al-Difla.

ʿAlīlī differed from other members of his social circle in that he had a gift for poetry. Completely illiterate, he composed folk poetry in the genre of the *malḥūn*. His poems reveal an intelligent, sensitive, and sympathetic man, with an irrepressible sense of humor. His poetry appears to have contributed to his notoriety, as the people of his village sought him for his wit and playful irony, even when they were the subject of his mockery.

This is only one side of his personality, the one the public saw and loved. There is another side to this man, revealed only to a few, as we see in the four panegyric poems he wrote to Hadj-Sadok. As mentioned earlier, the two men met in one of the village cafés where ʿAlilī used to recite his poems and sip coffee offered by members of the audience for the mere enjoyment of listening to him. The capacity to compose and recite—possibly perform—his poems, must have facilitated ʿAlilī’s social contacts with his peers as well as with wealthy villagers and outside visitors. Poetry was the instrument that led to his achievement of a degree of social prestige, in the same way that the reciters of the *Sirat Banī Hilāl* acquired importance whenever they performed, “the lowest of the low, the poets emerge on top” (Reynolds 1995: 91). Their prestige emanated from within the texts they revived and from their ability to enchant their audiences, even for short periods of time. ʿAlilī’s view of himself is more complex and might have been at the source of his depressed feelings noted in the panegyrics. He believed that as a poet he was entitled to more consideration, in line with the respect Arab poets had enjoyed in the past. This is clear in the following verse:

بكري الشاعر في ساعة السلاطين غدية
يلبس غير الرهيف وابرانص الرواح

Bakrī esh-shāʿer fī sāʿet es-salāṭīn ghadya
Yilbes ghayr er-rhif we brāniṣ er-rwāḥ

In the past, the poet stayed in the company of sultans,
Wearing only fine clothes and a new burnūs, too.

ʿAlilī’s frequent appearances in the village cafés were the result of his anxiety, and were motivated by a need to obtain a certain consideration, to count as an individual with some kudos—be it literary—among his peers. Hence his habitual hopping between the village cafés, reciting his poetry to different audiences and achieving renewed interest in his poetic dexterity and a wider circle of admirers. Here is how he explains his situation:

انضل نتطهم بين القهاوي/ ما يحللي من الفقر قعاد

Nḍal nettahham bayn el-qhawī / mā yḥlī min el-faqr gʿād

I keep moving between the cafés, too poor to enjoy settling somewhere.

His poverty and lack of social clout as well as his unemployment due to his failing health weighed heavily on his mind, as revealed in this verse:

اللي ما عنده صحة ولا يكسب مال / حد ما يشوف ليه بغير النافع

Ellī mā °endu šehḥa walā yeksab māl / ḥad mā yshūf lih bghayr en-nāfe°

Whoever has poor health and does not earn a living is not remembered when the bounty is distributed.

His panegyrics to Hadj-Sadok reveal a deeply anguished individual who felt useless and wished even to die. Though greatly honored by his benefactor's attention and concern for his well-being, he feared losing his friendship and held to him like a drowning man, which explains the combination of praise and blame expressed in his panegyrics. He said in a poem dated 1950, one year after the two men met for the first time:

خليت احبييك ضايق / صابر لرب العالمين

Khallayt ehḥibak ḍāyeq / šāber lirab el-°ālamīn

You left your friend in need, waiting for God's mercy.

He adds further in the same poem:

ما قلت هذا عليه انسقسى / كان ميت ومزال

Mā qult hādhā °alayh nsaqsī / kān mayyet wa mzāl

You did not think to inquire about him, and wonder whether he was dead or alive!

The four poems of praise are as much complaints and recrimination as they are tributes. Structured in a similar manner, they are conceived to provide a contrast between the destitution and humble origins of the poet and the perceived wealth and social prestige of his benefactor. Thus while Hadj-Sadok was the "cavalier of propriety," he, °Alilī, was "rotting in a well." No sooner does he elevate Hadj-Sadok to the rank of a sultan and caliph than he reminds him of the friend he forgot, as if he is entitled to share in his benefactor's wealth.

°Alilī's feelings of wretchedness were not without foundation, as in Algerian society, the *khammās* and the shepherd endured people's ridicule, as clearly revealed in this proverb:

السارح والخماس متخاصمين على رزق الناس

Es-sāreḥ wel-khammās mitkhāšmīn ʿalā rizq en-nās

The shepherd and the khammās fight over the livelihood of others.

Clearly, people involved in such activities were not held in high esteem, but rather occupied the lowest echelons of Algerian society at that time. As the *khammās* and the shepherd worked for others, had no property, and were at the mercy of their employers, they had no prestige. There were in fact strong traditions that defined the relationship between the *khammās* and his employer, as described by Benachenhou: "The *khammās* stays with his employer if he is happy. He is free, however, to leave him, but if he is indebted to him he is unable to leave him for another landlord. Farming customs do not allow it" (1971: 334). These traditions constituted a threat even to his family.

ʿAlilī's life was spent in a narrow round of activities, frequent visits to the village cafés, Friday prayers at the mosque, and occasional trips to nearby towns. He either traveled in search of seasonal work in ʿAfrūn, approximately 60 kilometers from Duperré, to supplement his income, or visited spas to treat his aches and pains.

An Atypical Peasant

The peasant has traditionally been the subject of practical jokes and humorous stories in Arab societies, with a reputation for naivety, lack of sophistication, and a tendency toward malice and craftiness. Victimized by the same culture that he enriches, the peasant is viewed in folk literature as a dull individual, lacking in taste and good manners, as illustrated by this proverb:

البدوي بدوي، ولو كان خلخاله يدوي

El-badwī badwī, walaw kān khulkhāluḥ yedwī

The Bedouin remains a Bedouin, even when his anklet tinkles.

According to the proverb, the peasant, referred to as Bedouin in Algeria, is recognizable even if he is wearing new clothes, symbolized here by the tinkling anklet.

ʿAlilī defies this stereotyping, revealing a likable personality and a witty man endowed with the ability to turn insignificant incidents into comical sketches, weaving them into entertaining stories. His poems reveal a shrewd but funny man, a practical philosopher and a poor farmer seemingly content with his life. Though his public poems reveal a tendency toward joviality, he

is more restrained in the poems composed as tributes to Hadj-Sadok, where he is even melancholic and despondent.

Nevertheless, °Alili is in many ways an atypical peasant. He does not fit the mold of the *badwī*, being neither superstitious nor traditional. Rather, he denigrates the amulets of the marabouts as mere tricks and mocks their healing power in his poem *al-Ḥumma fī Bū Ḥalwān*:

قلت أنا نبري فنتازي/ من الكتبة هذي فازي/ رحت لسي قويدر البرازي/
إلي عندوكم من عقار

*Qult anā nibrā fantazī / mil-kitba hādhī fazī / ruḥt lsī Qwayder el-
Barāzī / ellī °indū kam min °eqār*

I was determined to recover with modern medicine. These amulets I did not want any more. I went to Sī Qwaydar al-Barāzī, who has some medications.

Two French words are used in this extract: *fantaisie*, which implies here modern, or what old-fashioned people consider extravagant; and as if to mark the change of venue resulting from his decision to move to modern medicine, the poet uses the expression *vas-y* ('go'), quite common in colloquial Algerian.

°Alili is, in fact, the antithesis of the image of the illiterate, traditional peasant. His unbridled tendency to state frankly his opinion of others may be due to his position as *khammās*. Extremely poor, with nothing to lose, he enjoyed the freedom of expression of the dispossessed.

The Poet's Period

Bin al-Ṭayyib °Alili lived at a time when membership in religious brotherhoods was still widespread and popular, though not as strong as in pre-colonial times. The weakening of the religious brotherhoods was the result of a systematic and organized effort on the part of the colonial administration to break the stronghold of the religious leaders on their members. The aim of the French policy was to prepare the ground for more acceptance of France, which was seriously jeopardized by the efforts of the religious leaders to instigate the population to revolt, especially in rural areas. Soon after their conquest of the country, the French became aware of the threat that religious organizations posed, as revealed in these words: "The *zāwīyas* and other religious establishments became, as a result of fanaticism, small dens of hostile feelings toward any kind of government" (Depont and Coppolani 1897: 231).

A religious finding issued by the Muslim religious leaders warned against any collaboration with the infidels. Faced with a new kind of opposition, the French administration undertook a policy of conquest of a different kind.

The sources of funding for the religious orders came from membership fees, *waqf* (properties assigned for charity), and *zakāt* (alms giving, one of the five pillars of Islam). Those were gradually seriously curtailed. Their loss led to a shortage of funds needed to help the growing number of unemployed farmers whose lands were seized in guise of punishment for their uprisings against the colonial authority. More support for the Algerian population came from the *zāwīyas*, which, in addition to providing basic teaching, came to the destitute peasants' rescue in times of need. This ability to intervene in moments of crisis gave spiritual leaders an immense power over their congregations, one that the French political machine strove successfully to dismantle. Algeria's governor Jules Cambon succeeded in 1891 in winning over a number of powerful religious brotherhoods, thus guaranteeing the government "the support of the Cheikhuia, the Taybiyya, and a branch of the Qadiriyya, not counting the Tijaniyya, whose devotion toward France was the result of his efforts" (265). The ensuing dwindling activities of the religious organizations left a vacuum that the colonial administration failed to fill. The elimination of those safety nets hurt the same people the colonialist claimed it wanted to help, adding to their frustration and anger.

Concentrating their efforts on the control of the population, the colonial administration failed to measure the impact of its policy of intervention in religious affairs, committing one of the usual blunders of a colonial power: intransigence. The British colonial policy in India served as a model for the French in Algeria, leading them to win the opposition by awarding military leaders, religious notables, and marabouts high ranks. An example is the case of Bin Mubārak, whose allegiance was achieved in the following manner: "In 1831, we identified el-Hadj Nahied-dine Seghir ben Sidi Ali ben Mobarak. He was the head of an ancient and illustrious family of marabouts from Colea. We appointed him *Agha*, as a reward for the services he provided to us" (264). Another major victory for the colonial administration was the alliance of Bū °Amāma. A renowned nationalist, he fought the French armies for several years before changing camps. The French used his influence over his followers (a little over 3,000) to reinforce their position and expand their control over the Algerian territory beyond Algiers and Oran, and extending "to the oasis of Taouat, specifically the Gourara" (214). Bū °Amāma was a *mturnī*.²³

The colonial administration divided the brotherhoods it failed to rally to its ranks. As a result two religious authorities came into existence, one officially controlled by the colonial administration, the other independent and nationalist. The writer Aḥmad Riḍā Hūḥū denounced and ridiculed the official imams in his book *Ma° ḥimār al-ḥakīm* (1953). In a series of conversations with his

donkey, the author assessed the colonized society, blasting religious leaders and political representatives. The donkey even considered running in elections, as he felt mentally equal to the Algerian representatives! A journalist and a short story writer, Ḥūḥū was one of the most vocal members of the Association of Muslim ʿUlama. His plays, performed in colloquial Algerian, were powerful and a serious subject of concern for the French authorities. He was assassinated in 1956, presumably by the colonial authorities. The fear of a massive popular revolt haunted the colonial administration, who understood the power of oral transmission in a society with no mass communication. Leaving the field open to rumors could prove very difficult to control. Furthermore, "these rumors," explains Clancy-Smith, "articulated a language of power which boldly defied France's divinely ordained civilizing mission" (1994: 3).

Thus ʿAlili lived during a challenging period in his country's history, a time when external events (the Second World War) shook seriously the foundations of Algerian society. His poetry echoed the anxieties of his fellow Algerians and reflected the winds of change that were blowing over his village as well. His avant-garde outlook on life is revealed in his poems, which will be examined in the following chapter.

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Four

°Alilī's Repertoire

°Alilī's poems form a mini-encyclopedia of life in rural Algeria in the first half of the twentieth century. Although the scope of his poetry goes beyond the mere description of farming activities—providing vivid scenes of life in an Algerian village, revealing eating habits in *al-Rawz* ('Rice'), and displaying rural traditions such as customs governing the borrowing of farming tools in *al-Qādūm* ('The hoe')—the images are borrowed, primarily, from his environment. The six poems central to this study as well as the four tributes composed for Hadj-Sadok convey the feelings and emotions of a *khammās* who, though occasionally overcome by personal hardships and lacking personal clout, possessed great inner strength. °Alilī was neither intimidated by the political machine of the colonial administration nor deterred by the web of religious associations and brotherhoods hovering over rural areas in his time. Unlike some of the illiterate and unskilled urban Algerian workers interviewed by Pierre Bourdieu (1963) in the last years of French colonial rule, °Alilī did not consider his country's bleak future passively. Our poet, guided by his free spirit and a generally positive attitude, engaged in the criticism of his society, dissecting it with unusual openness and daring. A subtle sense of humor softens the blows he strikes against marabouts and *ṭulbā*. He does not hesitate to poke fun at prominent members of his community in two of his poems, *al-Qādūm* and *al-Rawz*, with obvious pleasure, jocularly, and endearing drollery.

°Alilī's repertoire is a platform for social reform. He does not skimp on advice to his compatriots, but refrains from playing the role of a moralist preaching to the Algerians like his contemporary, Mūsā bin al-Milyānī al-Aḥmadi. Other subtle messages emerge from his poems, such as his reflections on the futility of the pursuit of happiness in life in *al-Qādūm*.

His most entrenched and oblique message is political; two of his poems in particular are allegories predicting the end of colonial rule in Algeria. *Al-Rawz* offers a futuristic vision of the country, while *al-Qādūm* looks back on Algeria's past. With most of °Alilī's poems portraying abuse of power, both religious and political, they maintain a timeless quality and a sense of univer-

sality. Semantically the two poems run parallel to each other, and converge around their historical perspective. Through their multi-layered meanings, exposing corruption, denouncing exploitation, hypocrisy, and greed, *al-Rawz* and *al-Qādūm* rise above the obvious to examine into the impalpable and visionary. It is no mean feat for °Alili—a man with modest formal training, possibly limited to Friday sermons and the interpretation of Qur'ānic verses by a village imam with an equally modest scholarly background—to delve into concepts of such sophisticated nature as fleeting happiness, the importance of cooperation, and unity. The sustained and lengthy metaphors used to convey these concepts reveal great poetic skills and original narrative strategies. A detailed analysis of these aspects of °Alili's poems will follow later in this chapter.

A third poem, *al-Ḥummā fī Bū Ḥalwān* ('Burning fever in Bū Ḥalwān') hinges on progressive concepts and a reformist position synchronous with the campaign of the Association of Muslim °Ulama. It is here that the poet formulates clearly his unequivocal rejection of the practices of *ṭulbā* and marabouts, subjecting their supernatural powers to mockery, and openly ridiculing their materialistic tendencies. He mercilessly exposes their lack of compassion.

The tone of °Alili's other two poems, *al-Wagfa* ('Drought') and *Bāyet fī °Afrūn* ('Sleeping in °Afrūn') reflects deep anxiety and psychological turmoil, revealing the poet's vulnerable side. A total reversal of position occurs here, as °Alili seeks the intercession of those he taunted in his previous poems. With his country facing a devastating drought, and he enduring illness away from home, he reverts to seeking the traditional sources of support in such cases, saint worship and the advice of marabouts. This point will be developed later on in this chapter.

The only poem that appears to have been composed for his mere enjoyment is *Bidūn °unwān* ('Untitled'). It is not an innocent source of merriment, however, as the subjects of ridicule are other Algerians, members of the Berber community whose relationship with Arab Algerians has witnessed, throughout their common history, tense moments and a subtle rivalry played out often in the open, in folk literature. The poem is also an opportunity for °Alili to demonstrate his linguistic dexterity.

°Alili's poems can be playful, provoking laughter, or they can be deeply wrenching to those who have endured similar social and political injustices. They reveal a man who symbolizes the sense of loss and helplessness that characterized the Algerians' struggle against the various forces that assailed them throughout the colonial period. But these six poems provide only a partial image of the poet, whose personality remains by and large elusive. The portrait can only be completed with the panegyrics he addressed to Hadj-Sadok, where his emotions play out and much unsaid can be read between the lines. Juxtaposing the public poems with the private ones reveals multiple and unsuspected facets of °Alili's personality.

The Poet

°Alilī acts like a dilettante in the choice of his topics, composing only around subjects that have a special appeal to him and events that moved him one way or another. His repertoire, though modest, reveals a curious mind and a knowledgeable person. In a tribute to Hadj-Sadok he defends his reputation, listing a number of books with which he is familiar:

هذا القول مني صحيح منش كذاب / شفت وإمخالط الكتب أكثر
والفرقان لسيد الأولين كتاب / التوراة والإنجيل والزبور

*Dhāl-qawl minnī ṣḥīḥ manish kadhdhāb / shuft we mkhāleṭ el-ktūb
akthar*

Wel-ferqān lisayyed el-awwalin ktāb / et-tūrāya wel-injil, wez-zābūr

What I say is true, I do not lie, I saw and was surrounded by lots of books,

The Torah, the New Testament and the book of Psalms, and some more, but only the Master of the Universe knows.

°Alilī is obviously one of the “savants ignorants” Daumas (1853: 204) referred to when he described another Algerian folk poet whose knowledge and wisdom he greatly admired. The familiarity of an illiterate poet such as °Alilī with the holy books of Christianity and Judaism is not unusual though, as it is the result of life in Duperré, inhabited primarily by Europeans and also Jews (native to Algeria, settled in the country prior to the French conquest). The few Algerians living in the town were able to observe the social life and the religious practices of the two groups. Moreover, the Qur’ān makes numerous references to Christians and Jews, the people of the Book, in various chapters.

The poet, as observed in his work, is an independent thinker, a characteristic that sets him apart from folk poets of his time such as Dirqāwī and Lighrīsī, whom °Alilī seems to know well. In a tribute to Hadj-Sadok he asks him to convey his regards to the first man, while he praises the second:

أقبل شايح في القياذ / بلّغ سلامي للسيد الدرقاوي

...
معروف عند الرجال / جينالك السيد الغريسي

Qbil shāye° fil-qyād / ballegh salāmī lissayyed ed-Derqāwī

...
Ma°rūf °end er-rjāl / jīnālak es-sayyed el-ghrīsī

Convey my regards to Mr. Darqāwī, he has long been among the leaders;

...
Highly considered among men, we welcome you, Lighrīsī.

The use of the word *er-rjāl* (‘men’) is not meant to serve as a gender distinction but implies a number of qualities involving courage, strength, and generosity, all of which elicit respect in society. Whoever does not manifest such qualities is considered lacking in manhood, “mish rājel.”

The poems composed in praise of Hadj-Sadok reveal the intimate feelings of the poet, disclosing a depressed individual, absorbed by a sense of failure among his peers, as well as vis-à-vis his family. This lack of self-esteem might explain some of the disconcerting pendular shifts in his public positions, making us question the depth of his progressive stands noted in the poems identified in this chapter as the “poems of strength.” Some of these mood and position shifts can be attributed to his feeling of unworthiness, having failed to provide properly for his family, as reflected in these lines he wrote in a panegyric to Hadj-Sadok, where he favors death over a life of deprivation and humiliation:

ألي تدفنوني خير من ذا العذاب / ما خليت ملك ولا احواش بالسيم والجير
Ellī tedfnūnī khayr min dhāl-‘adhāb / mā khallayt melk walā ḥwash
bissīm wej-jīr

It is better for me to be buried than endure suffering, I have left no property and no house covered with plaster.

The Poems of Strength

Al-Qādūm: An Array of Rural Traditions

Al-Qādūm is in appearance a colorful sketch of the poet’s village and its inhabitants. It describes a class-conscious society and a group of rich landowners identified by the words “el-khiyām likbār” (‘the large tents’). The poem stresses the importance of the hoe for a farmer, enumerating its various uses to justify its owner’s relentless efforts to recover it. This is not an ordinary hoe, but a unique piece, beautifully crafted, the envy of the villagers. Its owner compares it to an attractive young woman:

عندي واحد القادم/منها راني مهموم/والخطابة كل يوم/في الخيمة ما نجبرهاش

‘*Endī wāḥed el-qādūm / minhā rānī mahmūm / wel khaṭṭāba kul yōm*
/ fil-khayma mā nujburhāshi

I have a hoe that causes me much concern. The suitors chase it
relentlessly. One day it disappeared from my tent.

The poet assumes here the position of external narrator playing the role of the main character in this poem-narrative. We know that the hoe occupies a privileged place in his life, since he keeps it in his tent, the symbol of nobility and value.

The importance of the hoe is further stressed when its owner hires a town-crier to look for it. The theft of agricultural tools and animals was common in Algerian villages; the town-crier acted usually as a go-between, intervening on behalf of the owner of the stolen possession in his discussions with the thief or thieves. Since the last borrower never returned it, he searches everywhere except in the houses of the village notables:

درتلها بشار/ راه يحوس في الدوار/ غير الخيام الكبار/ والقبضة ماردوهاش

*Dirtilhā bashshār / rāh yehawwes fid-duwwār / ghayr lkhyām likbār /
wel-qabḍa mā raddūhāshi*

I hired a town crier. He is searching for it in the *duwwār*, except in the
town notables' houses. Those who took it have not returned it.

Although the poet/narrator carefully excludes the notables from this search, he nevertheless seems to point a finger at all the village dwellers.

From this point on, the hoe moves from one individual to another, indefinitely. The search proves fruitless, but allows the poet to ridicule some of the village inhabitants. The whole setting appears to be a ploy for an opportunity to amuse or abuse the inhabitants of Duperré. A fascinating panorama emerges, with catchy portraits projected on the scene, as will be explained later in this chapter. The characters in the poem are mentioned by their real names (as confirmed by Hadj-Sadok) and identified by their distinguishing features, whether physical or moral.

The search for the hoe continues, taking the poet/narrator on a grueling journey in search of his beloved tool. He follows its trace in and out of the village, until he learns that it was sold in al-Ḥarrāsh, a suburb of Algiers, quite removed from his village. During the search the owner's mood vacillates between hope and despair, joy and frustration, due to the numerous false alarms and erroneous sightings:

منها راني نتنوى/ داها ذاك الهاوى/ في هدرتو يتلوى/ وراه كومي في لحواش

*Minhā rānī nitnāwa / dāhā dhāk el-hāwa / fi hadritū yetlawā / we rāh
kūmī fi laḥwāsh*

I am saddened by its loss. That good-for-nothing took it. He stammers when he talks. He is a farm agent and acts like a chief.

The poet is inconsolable, crying for the lost hoe as if it were human. His strong attachment to his hoe affects the structure of the poem, making him assume the role of narrator from the start: he never relinquishes the floor to the town-crier assigned to look for the hoe. Instead of reporting the progress of the search from an observer's position, the poet occupies center stage oblivious of the hired *bashshār*, totally absorbed by the fate of the stolen hoe. It is possible to follow the progression of °Alilī's despair throughout the poem. His psychological condition opens many of the verses. Here is how his emotional roller-coaster escalates:

Rāh ektalnī ghayr el-bkā راه إكتلني غير البكا

Crying over it is killing me.

Rāh ektalnī ghayr esh-shqā راه إكتلني غير الشقا

Fatigue is killing me.

Rāh ektalnī ghayr ez-z'āf راه إكتلني غير الزعاف

Anger is killing me.

The owner's consternation over the loss of the hoe reveals that this is no ordinary tool:

Ḥadidhā zayn we ṣāfi حديدها زين وصافي

Its iron is beautiful and pure.

Ḥadidhā zayn we yelma° حديدها زين ويلمع

Its iron is beautiful and shiny.

Qult fil-qat° tidwī قلت في القطع تدوي

I replied: "It whistles when it cuts."

The poet is obviously very proud of its sharp edge and its ability to perform well. Yet his failure to locate and recover the hoe proves very trying. He

is particularly angered by the liberties the borrowers take in handling it, as some lend it to their friends while others go so far as to sell it. It is an opportunity for him to point out people's carelessness and the lack of respect they have for the belongings of others. As the fruitless search drags on, his tolerance diminishes, leading to more sardonic portrayals of his hoe's abductors. In the ninth verse of the poem he lashes out against them:

داها واحد يصلوج/ باعها للقاييد العوسج/ أعطاهما لوليدو الاعرج/ بشاريتة حشاش

*Dāhā wāhed yeṣṣalwaj / bā^chā lilqāyed el-^cawsaj / a^cṭāhā liwliḏū
la^craj / bishwāritu ḥashshāsh*

A crafty man took it. He sold it to chief al-^cAwsaj. He gave it to his limping son, who cuts the grass and packs it.

Though referring to the obvious, the harshness of the above verse is better understood in light of Arab traditions that shun direct allusion to physical and mental handicaps, considering their mention inappropriate and even cruel.

Some images, on the other hand, are humorous:

رحت نمشي ونفتش/ حتى لوليد بن الاحرش/ قال لي داها بن مرزوقة يرعش/
عاظ السبسي ما يطفاش

*Ruḥt nimshī wenfattesh / ḥattā lewliḏ bin laḥrash / qallī dāhā ben
marzūqa yer^cesh / ^cāz es-sebsī mā yetfāsh.*

I walked and searched until I reached Bin al-Aḥrash's son. He told me: "Bin Marzūga took it, the one who shakes and whose pipe is always lit."

Another example is much less attractive, describing a less appealing sight:

خرج ليها واحد الملهوث/ باعوها في تالغوت/ عبايته غير البرغوث/ عمره ما يغسلهاش

*Kharaj lihā wāhed el-malhūth / bā^cūhā fī Talghūt / ^cabāytū ghayr il-
bargūth / ^cumruh mā yeghsilhāsh*

A lunatic went looking for it. He sold it in Talghūt. His ^cabāy [long, narrow garment of coarse wool] is full of lice, he never washes it.

The adventure continues as some borrowers are resentful of his insistence on recovering his tool, and even threaten never to return it:

داها القايد عبد السلام/ قال لي بطل من الكلام/ والا ما نقلبهاش

Dāhā l-qāyed °Abdeslām / qallī baṭṭel mil-klām / wellā mā niqlēbhāsh

And chief °Abd al-Salām took it. He told me to keep quiet or I would never recover it.

On a few occasions the hoe is almost within his reach, but he soon learns that it is with someone else. As his hopes of finding the lost tool vanish, in desperation he seeks other sources of help. He goes first to a marabout and then to a fortuneteller, whose advice ends the poem:

شاورت القزانة/ قالت لي تركب في الماشينة/ تحوس كل مدينة/ راهي انباعت في الحراش

Shāwert el-qazzāna / qāletlī terkab fil-māshina / ṭhawwes kul mdīna / rāhī nbā°et fil-Ḥarrāsh

I asked a fortuneteller. She told me: "Take the train, search in every city. It was sold in al-Ḥarrāsh."

The choice of al-Ḥarrāsh, a suburb of Algiers, too far from Duperré for the poet to visit readily, ends the search.

The irresponsible borrowers downplay the event by demeaning the hoe:

Hādhi ghayr ṇḥāsa

هذي غير نحاسة

It is nothing but a piece of metal.

To which the owner responds by stressing its quality, as mentioned earlier, as well as its multiple uses. He explains how it served to make holes in stones, to plough the earth, to remove mud, to chisel wood, to dig, to garden. This enumeration of its uses reveals the poet's familiarity with farming and farming tools and may possibly be aimed at impressing his listeners with his knowledge in this domain.

Social Dimensions

The other side of this mock-epic poem consists of a lively depiction of a panorama of life in an Algerian village and its social structure. The poet clearly disapproves of the class system that places him, a poor *khammās*, at the lowest rung of the social ladder. His defense mechanism in this situation is his playful irony and humor.

While his resentment is indirectly expressed here, it is the subject of bitter

complaints in his tributes to Hadj-Sadok. ‘Alilī is convinced that his indigence is at the root of the lack of consideration he encounters in his society:

الفقر جذام يأمم عينا/ مولاہ ایتلف القمنہ ایتلاح
یتلطم بین ذاک وذایا/ ویقولوا مطیار نعرف مباح

El-faqr judhām yā mummu ‘iniyyā / mūlāh yetlef el-qumna yetlāh
Yetlaṭam bayn dhāk we dhāya / weyqūlū miṭyār nʿraf mubāh

Poverty is like leprosy, O apple of my eyes! The poor is lost, and has no hope;
Jolted left and jolted right, “He is good for nothing,” people say, I know this for a fact.

‘Alilī drew original and humorous portraits of some of Duperré’s inhabitants, a gallery worthy of the famous French essayist La Bruyère’s *Caractères* (1688–96). Like a cartoonist, he depicted people’s distinguishing features and characteristics and stressed their comical sides. The approach was a guaranteed way to create an element of suspense and maintain the attention of his audience throughout the recitation of his poem.

Humor serves here as the weapon of choice for the defenseless, as it softens the blow of criticism, shifting the attention and the reaction to the cheerful side of words. Since the habit of borrowing tools without returning them was common in Algerian villages, it is not surprising that the suspected individuals listed throughout the poem were not at all piqued for being ‘exposed’ publicly. They should be credited for the poet’s success in exploiting this custom to the fullest, in a manner reminiscent of Juḥā’s stories.²⁴

An Elusive Hoe: Symbol of Unattainable Happiness

A simple story, this multi-faceted poem has, in addition to its sociocultural content, a philosophical dimension. The metaphor develops from the start, as the hoe is personified, taking the position of a beautiful young woman to whom suitors are attracted in large numbers.

In this rural society where success and failure and the quality of the harvest are not entirely dependent on man’s efforts, the ever-moving hoe symbolizes man’s pursuit of an elusive happiness. At the mercy of nature and unpredictable weather changes, living in apprehension of flood or drought, a farmer is continuously poised at the threshold of either wealth or destitution. Stuck in his status as *khammās*, ‘Alilī must have yearned for a better life. It is quite possible that he dreamed of owning his own plot and farming it to ameliorate his financial condition and raise his social status in the process. His dreams were crushed, however, when an injury prevented him

from working, thus destroying his last hope for material comfort. His search for the hoe across the countryside symbolizes this coveted but unattainable happiness.

The conclusion of the poem without the recovery of the hoe invites us to believe that its owner will never regain possession of it. It will always move one step ahead of him. Its presence in al-Ḥarrāsh, quite removed from °Alili's home town, conveys the image of a mirage constantly slipping away from the reach of those who approach it. The uncertainty of the search is a simulacrum of reality, where the pursuit of happiness often leaves its seekers empty-handed. The open-ended conclusion of the poem leaves the door open for a possible fulfillment of one's dreams.

The epic form of the poem serves admirably its underlying philosophy. Like a warrior defending his territory, the poet/narrator moves from one frustrating challenge to another, prepared to fight a slippery enemy. His efforts are derided and his hopes constantly shattered, rendering his futile pursuit a kind of Kafkaesque entrapment. The atmosphere of disaster surrounding a rather banal and amusing incident, quite common in the poet's society, sets the stage for dramatic effect and social crisis.

A Symbol of Colonial Policy

Two issues take shape in *al-Qādūm*, one philosophical, discussed above, the other political. It is important to recall first the policy of land expropriation administered by the French colonial power to punish the Algerian insurgents and discourage future uprisings. The seized lands were meant for the French and Swiss farmers who had lost their vineyards to phylloxera in the mid-nineteenth century and chose to emigrate to Algeria to rebuild their lives.

In addition to its arbitrary nature, the seizure of land was a flagrant case of usurpation. A clear parallel emerges between the borrowers of the hoe who took great liberties in disposing of it as they pleased, and the French colonial policy in Algeria. It was clearly a case of giving away something that did not belong to them to someone who did not have a right to it. The European newcomers amassed fortunes and accumulated huge wealth exploiting the usurped lands of the Algerian farmers, while the latter became hired hands on their own farms, thus inflating the ranks of the agricultural proletariat that later invaded the cities. The colonial administration dismissed the peasants who continued to claim their properties the way the borrowers of the hoe sneer at the proprietor's insistence on recovering his tool. The owner finds himself in the uncomfortable position of having to prove the obvious, a difficult position to be in, no matter what the case. He incessantly has to explain its importance in his work and defend it against those who try to disparage it. Mortified by the loss of the hoe and the petty

schemes of the various borrowers, the owner stresses his attachment to his tool, lest he be accused of neglect and abandonment and thus provide an argument to his foes.

A Poetic Narrative

Proceeding in harmony with Lévi-Strauss's concept of the complementary nature of folk literary genres, it is possible in the case of *al-Qādūm* to establish the structural similarities it has with the folktale. The poem is narrated like a tale, with morphological similarities to that genre, presenting a plot, an episode, motifs, a setting, a theme, and a denouement. Though the philosophical message of fleeting happiness in *al-Qādūm* differs from that of a folktale, it involves a journey in search of a valuable item. The missing damsel in the poem is a rare hoe coveted by the village farmers, which the poet appropriately puts in the position of an attractive young woman sought daily by suitors. The protagonist, like the hero of a folktale, embarks on a perilous journey, confronting the forces of evil who have abducted his hoe. He receives threats and some encouragement, and seeks the help of a sorceress. Unlike a folktale, however, the poem does not have a happy ending, since the tool is not recovered. But the protagonist learns, or rather formulates, a lesson on the unattainability of happiness.

The superiority of *al-Qādūm* over a folktale lies in the unpredictability of the outcome. While it is known that a tale will have a happy ending, the fate of the protagonist and the object of his search in the poem remain a mystery until the end.

The action in the poem proceeds on two levels, one involving a change of location each time the protagonist receives information on the hoe, the other being the emotional level. There, the poet reveals indirectly his true feelings toward the village families mentioned in *al-Qādūm*, primarily sketching rather than enunciating his sentiments, as a cartoonist usually does. In modern terms, he performs a one-man show, revealing himself to be an innate storyteller.

In an effort to explain 'Alili's ability to enjoy popularity despite deriding his fellow villagers, I share Finnegan's conclusion on the power of a literary genre to convey meaning while attenuating its impact. She writes: "It is as if expression in poetry takes the sting out of the communication" (1992: 224). In the case of *al-Qādūm*, humor is an additional factor cushioning the impact of criticism.

Structure of al-Qādūm

Structurally, 'Alili's poems fall within the scope of Algerian *malhūn* in its two forms, the strophic and the isometric. This does not mean, however, that the poet conforms faithfully to either of those two basic divisions,

revealing the freedom the poet took in his work, possibly due to his lack of familiarity with the technical aspect of *malḥūn* and his reliance on the *salīqa*, his instinctive innate gift for poetry. The metagrowth of this folk genre led to its flexibility, allowing new poetic forms such as the ones composed earlier by the Fāsī poets and known as °*arūd al-balad*, explained in chapter two.

An effort to apply the meters of the classical *qaṣīda*, the *buḥūr*, to °Alilī's poetry fails due to the numerous broken feet in his poems and the structural liberties he took. The process reveals, however, a rich inner rhyme.

I will attempt to comment on the structure of the poems, beginning with *al-Qādūm*. Each verse is formed of four hemistichs: the first three share an end-rhyme, which varies from verse to verse, while the fourth ends always in the syllable *āsh* (اش), whose repetition gives the poem great stability and balances the diversity of the inner rhyme. The distribution within the poem of the inner rhyme of the first three hemistichs has no clear pattern, but seems to be dictated by the requirements of meaning. In a few cases, one of the three rhyming hemistichs ends with a long vowel, while the other two end with short vowels, as in the following verse:

هذي غير نحاسة/ داها جلول بن موسى/ قال نوريلك عرصة / تبكر ليها بالفراش

*Hādhī ghayr nḥāsa / dāhā Jallūl bin Mūsā / qāl nwarriḥlak °arṣa /
tbakker lihā bel-frāsh*

"It is nothing but a piece of metal." Jallūl bin Mūsā took it. "Let me show you a prickly pear tree," he said. "Pick its fruits early in the morning."

The poet relies on the system of stresses, shortening the sound of the broken alif in *Mūsā* to comply with the *tā' marbūṭa* in both *nḥāsa* and °*arṣa*.

The rhyme pattern changes from one verse to the other. In some it is: *fa°lun fa°lun ma°ulān*, and in others the meter is: *fa°lun, fa°lun ma°ulun*.

The meter of Algerian *malḥūn* is not quantitative as is the case in classical Arabic poetry but rather syllabic, with an unusual tendency to begin a word with a *sukūn*, influenced by spoken language. The use of stress to convey the meaning seems to be the rule here, making oral performance an important part in the study of the poetic technique of Algerian *malḥūn*.

Al-Rawz: The Image of the Present and a Vision of the Future Circumstances of the Poem

The poem *al-Rawz* was composed during the Second World War, when imported rice appeared on the Algerian market and was available at a very low

price, filling the vacuum created by the scarcity of semolina. Algeria had previously depended on France for most of its food imports, but the war prevented the free flow of merchandise between the two countries.

Because rice was cheaper than semolina, it temporarily became the food of the poor. Once the situation improved, couscous regained its place as the country's staple food and its favorite cooked dish. The scarcity of food products as well as their elevated prices pushed people to search for alternatives, many resorting to eating plants that grew in the wild. Rice came to compete with other edible plants for a share of the Algerian family dinner table.

Rice was imported from an unspecified sub-Saharan African country referred to in the poem as *barr as-sūd* ('the country of the blacks'), possibly Senegal. Its arrival at the railway station is described as an eventful occurrence, surrounded by the hubbub of the *ṭulbā* and the Jewish merchants who struck the deal:

من بابور النار/ انزل في لا قار/ هدت قاع الصغار/ غي بمزاودهم

*Min bābūr en-nār / nzel fī lāgār / haddet gāc eṣ-ṣghār / ghī
bimzāwedhum*

It [the rice] arrived by train, it stepped down at the station. All the young people rushed about carrying their provision bags.

The merchants specify the purpose of the imported product:

قالهم النعيل/ اندير تاويل/ ينفع القليل/ والرخيص يوالم

Qālhum en-n'īl / endir tāwīl / yenfa' el-qlīl / wer-rkhīṣ yewālem

The Jew told them: "Let's make a deal, it is intended for the poor, its cheap price is ideal."

A rather useless recommendation, since once on the market rice attracted everybody, including the rich, who rushed to buy it, competing for it with the poor. First in line were the judges and the aghas:

أشراوه لغوات/ موالين القاطات/ حتى للقطات/ راه معيشتهم

Shrāwh leghwāt / mwālīn el-qāṭāt / ḥattā lil-qadāt / rāh m'īshethum

The aghas buy it, clad in their embroidered costumes. Even the judges feed on it.

Alarmed by such popularity, the local plants were humiliated and decided to fight back. The battle took the form of a confrontation, where the edible plants engaged rice in a virulent debate. The exchange of attacks consisted of a verbal match during which each party pointed out its superiority over the other. Rice was clearly in control, surpassing its opponents in the quantity and quality of the arguments presented. Having been so favorably received by the Algerian people, most especially by the rich and mighty, rice sailed through its self-defense. Its eloquence could not be matched by the weak argumentation of the wild plants, who had few if any qualities to boast about:

قال أنا صافي / أو ميزاني وافي / نخرج لضيافي / أو عمري ما نحشم
وأنتي غير سلوك / قاع اللي ياكلوك / فوادهم مهلوك / والوجه معظم
تنوضي في الفوسيات / تنقاسي بالبالات / عافوك الخودات / تسبغ في الفم

Qāl: Anā šāfi / ū mizānī wāfi / nukhruj liḍyāfi / ū °umrī mā niḥshem
Wentī ghayr slūk / gā° ellī yāklūk / fuwādhum mahlūk / wel-wajh
m°azzem

Tnūḍī fil-fūsiyāt / tinqāsi bil-bālāt / °āfūk il-khūdāt / tusbugh fil-fam

Rice responded: "I am pure, I weigh nicely on the scale. I welcome my guests, I am never embarrassed, While you are full of fibers. All those who eat you have ruined stomachs and bony faces. You grow in ditches, you are handled with shovels. Beautiful women dislike you, you stain their mouths."

Were it not for the support of the broad bean, a favorite Algerian vegetable, the wild edible plants would have lost the battle and suffered a crushing defeat.

A Vegetarian Debate

The main players in the poem are plants with no nutritional value that grow in the wild, in the Algerian countryside. In times of need, poor people resort to munching on them to fill their empty stomachs. The confrontation between the wild edible plants and rice is, despite its amusing nature, a story of poverty and deprivation. The background to this allegory is a bleak picture of hunger and starvation, which pervaded the country during the Second World War. Imported to alleviate the serious food shortages that threatened the country, rice was coveted by all. It became an instantaneous success, very popular both for its low price and its filling nature. Faithful to his rural roots and speaking

through the broad bean, the poet/narrator, who like most Algerians endured the war conditions, sided with the local wild plants. He seizes the opportunity to blast the “enemies” of the people, those who welcomed the intruder, rice. In his usual mocking style, ‘Alilī indicates that the wild edible plants are the lot of the *khammās*, with a subtle underlying note of self-pity, as he says:

وانت لبني مخمس/ مقبوس وباخس/ في السومة راخس/ لا حد يساوم

Wenta lbani mkhammas / maqyūs we bākhes / fis-sōma rākhes / lā ḥad yesāwem

You are meant for the *khammās*; you are a cheap, rotten produce.
Your price is so low, no one bargains over you.

‘Alilī’s pride visibly suffers from his status as *khammās* used here as a symbol of poverty, thus changing his role from spectator to participant and greatly personalizing the poem. It seems normal that the situation is resolved to the advantage of the local edible plants, with the leadership of one of Algeria’s favorite home grown vegetables, the broad bean:

ساعة جاه الفول/ إذهب يا مذلول!/ ها صحة يا لغول/ ها ليك المرسم

Sā‘a jāh el-fūl / edhhab yā mazlūl! / hā ṣaḥḥa yāl-ghūl / hā lik el-marsam

Then came the broad bean and said to the rice: “Get out, you vile grain!” “Very well, you ogre,” said the rice, “I leave this place for you.”

Social Dimension

The theme of *al-Rawz* goes beyond the mere concept of a dietary item and its availability for the poor of the country. The fact is that the subject hinges on a fine line between charity and pride, a tradition in Algerian society according to which poor people hide their hunger, choosing to suffer rather than reveal their true condition. They would pretend to be full, whenever pressed to eat by those who know their destitution. The following proverb explains the importance of saving face and maintaining appearances:

مرّ على عدوك جوعان/ ولا تمر عليه عريان

Murr ‘ala ‘aduwwak jū‘ān, walā tmurr ‘alih ‘eryān

Pass your enemy hungry, but never pass him naked.

An extended dependency on wild edible plants was generally easy to detect, as they betrayed their consumer by a thin, bony face. Describing the dependence of Algerian families on wild plants for survival in moments of need, Yvonne Turin wrote: "Many families are forced to resort to roots from the ground to meet their needs" (1971: 239). Children involved in such activities usually missed school, and many classrooms almost emptied whenever penury struck. The wild edible plants were mere stomach fillers for the poor, an uneven match for rice, giving it the opportunity to boast about its nutritious value and even its attractive color. It was impossible for the wild edible plants to challenge it.

Rice's social connections are a source of pride and protection for this intruder, whose qualities cannot be denied:

انطاق ليہ الروز/ في لوطان انجوز/ ما خليت دروز/ سقسي قايدهم
وانت تتلاوح/ وأنا نظراوح/ إيشيرات تتماوح/ وعزیز علیهم

Ntāq lih er-rawz: / fī lewṭān njūz / mā khallayt drūz / saqsi qāyedhum
Wenta tetlāwah / wanā niṭrāwah / īshirāt tetmāwah / we °aziz °alihum

Rice replied: "I have been everywhere, even to the land of the Druze:
ask their leader.

While you lament, I am at ease, loved by young women, and eager to please."

It is not clear why the poet specifies the country of the Druze as a means for rice to boast about its extensive traveling and popularity. One possible explanation may be that the reference is to Syria, country of final exile for the amir °Abd al-Qādir (1856), and by extension the Lebanese sector where the Druze lived. The supposition is not so outlandish, after all, as there might have been discussions in the poet's surroundings about the early decades of the French conquest and the fate of °Abd al-Qādir after he left Algeria in 1847, going first to France and later to Syria, where he settled down.

A Metaphor for the Colonial Presence

Innocent and playful in appearance, *al-Rawz* provides more than the story of the glorious arrival of a new food product, its popularity, and its final demise. The charming debate between the local wild edible plants and rice is molded into a political metaphor where the outsider/intruder rice, the white popinjay, symbolized the colonial presence, and the green plants portrayed Algeria's native inhabitants. The confrontation of the two opponents with their symbolic colors represents the two communities at odds with each other, with on one side the settlers, fair and healthy-looking, and on the other side the dark

Algerians with their sallow skins. Furthermore, *akhḍar* ('green'), a common male name in Algeria, symbolizes revival and was a popular theme in Kateb Yacine's plays (1959).

The confrontation between the intruder rice and the resident wild edible plants parallels the events of the French landing in 1830, the conquest of the country, the settlement of the *colons*, and the Algerians' reaction to their presence, their policies, and their abuses. The favors enjoyed by rice allude to the benefits reaped by the European settlers who amassed fortunes while the majority of the indigenous population, the rightful owners of the usurped lands lived in utter poverty. Concerned by the disproportionate distribution of wealth in Algeria, Maurice Viollette, who was also its governor, provided a vivid contrast of the two communities in his book *L'Algerie vivra t-elle?* He described the living conditions of the native population in these words: "The indigenous family lives in deplorable sanitary conditions. There is no furniture [in the hut] except utensils to make fire and serve a meal that never changes and is hardly sufficient to support the activity of the body" (1931: 126). Opposed to this bleak picture is the wealth of the *colons*: "All the viticultural land, the citrus fruit plantations, cotton, lands of early vegetables and fruits, the richest fields of cereal are in the hands of the Europeans, who also own the totality of the industry and three-quarters of the trade" (125–26). This unbalanced prosperity witnessed daily by the deprived Algerians was reiterated by Mouloud Mammeri in a letter to a French friend during the early years of the war of independence, in which he wrote: "Before the Second War, the Arabs, the Algerians believed in nothing and especially not in themselves. . . . They had been often told: you are Arabs, you are nothing, and every day they noted it: power, wealth, beauty, science, the vineyards, languages, tennis courts, the beaches, the cars, everything that was good and beautiful, warm and big belonged to the Europeans" (1957: 35). It is not surprising therefore, that discontent and resentment settled in the midst of the native population. That attractive picture was coveted by many Algerians, who aspired to acquire similar wealth, and a kind of love-hate relationship marked their comportment vis-à-vis the *colons*. Thus the image of rice first sought by all and later rejected corresponds to the colonial situation in Algeria. Soon after it had entered the country, few escaped its charm; it was especially liked by young women for its versatility, serving as part of the main course and a dessert:

كي يدخل يبرير / يضحي شاني كبير / ونصبح ديسير / نخرج للحاكم

Kī yudkhol yebir / yedhā shānī kbīr / we niṣbaḥ disīr / nukhroj lil-ḥākem

"When April comes around, my importance increases: I become a dessert, served to the ruler."

The long list of benefits cited by rice to explain its popularity echoes the claim advanced by the advocates of colonialism in support of foreign occupation, which according to them improved the quality of life of the colonized peoples, taking them from the jungles of ignorance to the bliss of civilization.

The political significance of the poem remains subtle and transpires through the characteristics of the main players: the broad bean, rice, and the wild edible plants. Attractive and nutritious, rice is also sophisticated, eloquent, and never at a loss for strong arguments, a clear allusion to the power of the colonial administration. Countering this powerful speaker and its logical defense were the weak, emotional pleas of the edible wild plants, their timid voices failing to match their enemy’s eloquence. With hardly a nutritious advantage for their consumption, they had no more than reprimanding words for rice, simply accusing it of being unfair:

طلّت القرنينة/ قالت: روح علينا/ أو بركة يزينا/ في الزور تخاصم

Ṭallat el-garnina / qālet: rūḥ ‘alina / ū barka yezzina / fiz-zōr tkhāsem

The wild artichoke looked in and said: “Go away, we have had it with you, your arguments are false.”

إتطيني بنت احذر/ تعرف اتمصر/ وانت تتمسخر/ يا داك الظالم

Ittayyibni bint ḥdhar / ti‘raf tmaṣṣar / wenta titmaskhar / yā dāk ez-zālem

“The city girl cooks me, she knows how to handle matters. You poke fun at me, you are so unfair.”

True to his nationalist spirit, the poet/narrator granted the final victory to his country’s vegetables, bringing in a strong defense lawyer, broad bean, who in a show of force and unity threw rice out of the country!

The easy compliance of the arrogant rice to its humiliating expulsion is somewhat surprising. Yet in hindsight its departure eerily foretells the panic that set in among the *colons* in 1962, forcing them to leave everything behind, especially after the terror campaign of the Organisation de l’Armée Secrète (OAS), which failed to overturn the signature of the peace accord between the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) and the French government.

On another level, the popularity of rice, sought even by wealthy and powerful Algerians, is an allegory of a double phenomenon in the colonized society. On the one hand it refers to the gradual shift of allegiance of some Algerian notables to the French colonial administration, and on the other hand it serves as an oblique allusion to the seductive appeal of European women to Algerian

men. Following Algeria's conquest by the French, the number of mixed marriages grew remarkably, leading to serious concern on the part of the country's intellectuals. Algerian short story writers, in particular, in the first half of the twentieth century, criticized men's preference for Western women and its long-term impact on a new generation formed of children born to mixed couples as a serious threat to the religious and racial makeup of the population. The debate over these issues took place on the pages of the press of the Association of Muslim 'Ulama, *al-Shihāb* and *al-Baṣā'ir*.²⁵ Writers claimed that men who married a *rūmiyya* (a Christian woman) were responsible for the celibacy of Algerian women and for exposing their children to the influence of a different faith and a foreign culture. Riḍā Ḥūḥū, more than any other writer of the time, paid special attention to the issue, accusing Algerian men in his short story "Ḥimār al-ḥakīm wa-l-zawāj" ('al-Ḥakīm's donkey and marriage,' *al-Baṣā'ir*, March 7, 1949) of being the victims of an inferiority complex. Ḥūḥū represented the voice of wisdom in the emotional debate that surrounded this topic, seizing on the opportunity to argue in favor of women's education in "Barīd ḥimār al-ḥakīm" ('The correspondence of al-Ḥakīm's donkey,' *al-Baṣā'ir*, November 7, 1949), explaining that educated Algerian men married French women because they wanted educated wives. His solution presented a double advantage, counteracting mixed marriages and offering women the appropriate tool to strive for emancipation and achieve it in a constructive manner. Ḥūḥū championed the cause of Algerian women, attracting attention to their plight in his writings. His position is best defined in the dedication he wrote in his novel *Ghādat Umm al-Qurā* ('The young woman of Umm al-Qurā,' 1947): "To her who lives deprived of the blessings of love, the blessings of education, the blessings of freedom, to this sad, neglected creature in life, to the Algerian woman, I dedicate this story, as an expression of consolation and solace."

The allegory of the colonial period developed in *al-Rawz* sheds light on a segment of the population, the Algerian peasants who endured most during the French colonial period. Time had obviously not succeeded in weakening their determination to end the occupation of their country and to participate in the struggle for its liberation as well. It is striking, however, that *al-Rawz*, composed long before the independence of Algeria (though we do not have a date, we know that the poem was available before independence, since the poet died in the mid-1950s), but at a time when the dissatisfaction of the people had reached a boiling point, foresaw the end of colonialism and the expulsion of the intruder. The conclusion of the poem is akin to the premonitions of a visionary.

The Munāẓara Style

The metaphor of Algeria's conquest developed in *al-Rawz* is constructed along the lines of a literary form called *munāẓarāt* (singular, *munāẓara*), consisting of a debate between "two or more contestants, often personified objects" (Van

Gelder 1998: 186). There are disagreements among researchers as to its origin, some dating it to the ninth century (Holes 1996: 304), while others (Van Gelder 1998) place it in an earlier period in history. Whereas a *munāzara* ends, usually, happily, with the reconciliation of the debating parties, *al-Rawz* concludes with the ousting of rice, with no possibility for a happy ending.

The *munāzara* form was used in the vernacular of a number of Arab countries including Algeria (Holes 1996: 304), and it is quite possible that °Alili had heard poems composed along the debate genre in his village or in the surrounding areas. The *munāzarāt* were particularly common in Médéa, a close enough region for its folk poetry to have reached Duperré. Jocular in nature, this genre admirably suited °Alili's inclination for sprightly language. Sonneck (1904) recorded a number of poems along the line of the *munāzara*, further revealing the familiarity of Maghribi folk poets with the genre (see the debate between "a rider and his horse," 206, and the debate between "a city woman and a country woman," 200).

Al-Rawz bears such a striking resemblance to a poem composed in Bahrain titled the "Dispute of coffee and tea," believed to have been composed in the 1930s or 1940s by °Abdallah Ḥusayn al-Qārī (Holes 1996: 306), that it merits a close examination. Both poems are characterized by their humorous tone, which serves to conceal their didactic message, and are constructed on the same system of confrontation between a foreign product and a local one. In the case of "Dispute of coffee and tea," tea is the outsider (the country of origin is Iran) and coffee, a local plant of the region, is the insider, the favorite drink of Bedouins. Colors too are significant, as tea boasts a lighter, ruddy color, "shabīh il-yāqūt" ('like ruby'; Holes 1996: 313), and derides coffee, whose dark color is that of servants. Both drinks also convey a social message, since tea is the drink of the upper classes and coffee that of the uncouth Bedouins. The two poems differ, however, in their conclusions, due to different political and social realities in the two countries. The diverse population of Bahrain dictated a conciliatory tone and a positive end to the confrontational debate between tea and coffee.

A Lesson in Solidarity

Al-Rawz promotes an important lesson in solidarity, vital in the struggle against the colonizer. So long as the contentious verbal debate was carried out by each individual plant, it failed to achieve its purpose and rice continuously emerged victorious. It is only when all the wild edible plants rallied their efforts in a single, united front, under the leadership of the broad bean, that they were able to defeat their enemy. The self-assertive broad bean chased away the conceited rice, providing a powerful example of unity for the Algerian people.

Furthermore, the poem highlights the role of the collaborators who conspired with the occupying power. The list of culprits includes the usual char-

acters—the greedy judge, the *ṭulbā*, and the merchants primarily interested in material gains. The lesson that underscores the behavior of the *mturnīs* is that their shortlived windfall, like rice, will soon come to an end, leaving them to face their shameful behavior. It is obvious from the frequent appearance of hypocritical judges, opportunistic *ṭulbā*, and exploiting marabouts that °Alilī delights in denouncing those he considers the enemies of the people.

Caricature as a Political Tool

°Alilī's qualities as caricaturist and humorist are at their best in *al-Rawz*. The poet succeeded, thanks to his sharp wit and his sense of observation, in turning the tables against a then-popular food product, uncovering defects where none had been suspected. He denounced the chalky, white color of rice and its density that made its eaters feel stuffed, and he accused it of causing an unpleasant smell in its eater's mouth. The most incriminating argument against it, uttered by one of the local plants, is a racial comment meant to denigrate rice:

إنت في ساليقان/ ياكلوك الوصفان/ شكيتك مصنان/ وتخنز الفم

Inta fī sāliqān / yāklūk el-weṣfān / shkītak miṣnān / wet-khannez el-famm

“In Senegal, the blacks eat you. You stink and smell in the mouth.”

Though the term *wiṣfān* means ‘black’ in current Algerian dialect, it also refers to black slaves, revealing a racist sentiment in the position of the wild edible plants. Desperate in their efforts to disparage rice and having failed to find fault with its appearance, except for its chalky color—hardly a defect in a society attracted by light skin color—they debase it by association.

Beyond this amusing, metaphorical melodrama, where wild edible plants are vividly personified, the poet has a more important and pressing mission. He is concerned about serious infractions of justice committed by those who were expected to uphold the highest standards of fairness in society. He denounces them, mocking them in pointed caricatures. The rush of wealthy Algerians to profit from the affordable rice, competing with the poor for a food staple not meant for them, is not acceptable to °Alilī. Armed with the only weapon at his command, he embarrasses the high officials, possibly humiliating them. He denounces the judge for the deals concocted with the Jewish rice merchants, a step that could compromise his position, putting him at the mercy of the merchants, who would in turn ask for favors. A mordant image of the judge portrays him sending coded messages to a merchant while on the bench, presiding over a case in the courthouse:

أو حتى العادل/ لليهودي يرسل/ ويروح يحلل/ أو يغمز بالفم

Ū ḥattāl-°ādel / lil-yāhūdī yersel / weyrūḥ yeḥallel / ū yeghmez bil-famm

Even the upholder of justice contacts the Jew. While ruling in court,
he sends messages with his mouth askew.

A detailed description of the judge's brick house (very different from a *gurbī* made of mud) and his furniture follows, consisting of mattresses and sheets, a real luxury seen through the eyes of a poor *khammās*. The contrast between this image of wealth and the competition with the poor over rice is meant to highlight the avarice and meanness of wealthy judges.

The tendency to mock judges in Arabic folklore reflects peoples' ambiguous relation with authority. The victims of the justice system see the judge as a symbol of injustice, a puppeteer manipulating the law and applying it capriciously. Qāsim notes a similar portrayal of judges in the *sīra* ('biography') of al-Zāhir Baybars (1998: 88). Judges have been easy targets for critics and caricaturists alike. Their frequent comical portrayal exposes the popular obsession with those who do not practice what they preach. Juḥā jeers at judges in a few adventures, as in "The judgement of the qadi" (Bushnaq 1986: 322) and "Djeha and the qadi's coat" (266). Like °Alilī, Juḥā revels in denouncing the judge's treachery.

A Tactical Move

Ironically, the poet/narrator who indulged in criticism of rice eaters succumbs himself to the seduction of low cost and high yield, participating in the general frenzy. Being one of the poor members of his society for whom the rice was intended, he buys it, cooks it, eats it, and judges it to be tasty. He describes his experience in these words:

كيلتو وزهيت/ واديت للبيت/ درت معاه الزيت/ مرسوات شحم

Kayyaltō we zheyt / weddayt lil-bayt / dirt m°āh ez-zayt / morsuwāt shḥam

I weighed some and rejoiced, took it home with me, cooked it in oil
and pieces of suet as well.

This seemingly contradictory behavior is in reality a tactical move to place rice and *khubbayz* (mallow) face to face, in a confrontational position. It is possibly another way for the poet/narrator to emphasize his indigence, highlighted by the availability of the wild edible plants in his house. The use of the dialogue as his technical tool sets the stage for a very lively performance that the poet might have offered his live audience at the village café, mimicking

the various characters and simulating the sounds heard at the railway station upon the arrival of the rice.

Linguistically, the quoted verse includes the French word *morceau* ('piece'), deformed and made plural as *morsowāt*, a word frequently used in Algerian vernacular, cited as an example of the deep infiltration of French words in spoken Algerian.

Rhyme in al-Rawz

Each verse in *al-Rawz* consists of four hemistichs, rhyming a a b, the b being the end rhyme for all the verses of the poem (31 lines), corresponding to the letter *mīm* (م) in Arabic. The hemistichs are generally short, adding agility and speed to the action, in synchrony with the dialogue structure of the poem. The curttness of the speech contributes to the playful nature of the poem and its humorous tone. This social satire is far from having a sound metrical form and sustains more than a single meter: *faʿlun mafʿūlun*, *faʿlun mafʿūlun*; and: *faʿlun mafʿūlūn*.

Neither *al-Rawz* nor *al-Qādūm* conforms to the traditional structure of *malhūn*, common also to *zajal* and *ʿarūd al-balad*. They neither have a strophic form nor always carry a *maṭlaʿ* and a *qifl*, and whenever this happens it seems more the result of a coincidence than a conscious effort on the part of the poet to follow the rules. The panegyric poems that ʿAlilī composed as a tribute to Hadj-Sadok and dictated to a *ṭālib* in Duperré exhibit the above divisions, however. Since this is an unusual feature absent from the other poems, it is safe to assume that the copying *ṭālib* took liberties in dividing the verses according to the traditions of Algerian *malhūn*.

The Trials of *Ṭulbā* and Marabouts

Al-Ḥummā fī Bū Ḥalwān: Setting the Stage

The *ṭulbā* are among ʿAlilī's major targets, though less harshly treated than the judges. He even shows some compassion toward them in *al-Rawz*, in view of their extreme poverty, though he does not hesitate to mock their dependence on other people's charity for their livelihood. It is in *al-Ḥummā fī Bū Ḥalwān* ('Burning fever in Bū Ḥalwān'; Bū Ḥalwān is now al-Ḥasaniyya, about 30 kilometers west of ʿAfrūn), that he launches his most virulent attack on them.

A pernicious trial of the *ṭulbā* and the marabouts takes place in the poem. The religious authorities who were only gently slighted in *al-Rawz* are now the subject of a savage exposé of their exploitation of religion, their abuse of people's trust, and their lack of compassion. In more than one place the *ṭulbā* are portrayed as parasites and manipulators. ʿAlilī depends on the effective use of comic situations to build his case. He slowly sets the stage to trap his

enemies, escorting them to their ruin rather than assailing them with vituperative language. The opening verses are wrenching, and compel the listener to feel sorry for an ill man:

يا خوتي ماذا نحكيكم/ من ذا الظربدا يتلايم/ طول الليل انبات انخمم/ وأنا في واحد
التزيار

*Yā khawtī madhā niḥkīlukum / min dhā ez-ẓar badā yetlāyem / ʔūl el-
layl nbāt nkhammem / wanā fī wāḥed et-tizyār*

What do you want me to tell you, brothers, about this illness which afflicted me. I spent the night thinking, enduring great pain.

In order to find some relief, the poet/narrator seeks a cure for his illness, compelled to travel to faraway places, going from one *wālī* to the other, looking for a remedy for a high fever that makes him extremely weak and slightly disoriented. He sets out on his journey, traveling by train on what seems like an endless pilgrimage. Surprisingly, the lengthy and arduous trip that might have aggravated his condition finds him alert, acutely aware of his surroundings. He is attentive to details, remarking that the train's chimney is "made of copper" and the station chief was blowing his whistle. Once on board, this sick man names the towns the train passes through, and observes that while going through Shlif, the tomb of a marabout from the region of al-Khaḍra, Sidi Yahyā "was decorated" for his anniversary. Upon stepping down from the train, the patient, who has been alert throughout the ride, collapses at an opportune moment, before a group of *ṭulbā*. The narrator's action seems quite theatrical, akin to a tragi-comedy:

طحت أنا ثم مهرشم/ لاغيت على ي بلقاس/ لا غناش تبرد ذي السم/ تكتبلي جوز اسطار

*Ṭiḥt anā thamma mharsham / lāghayt ʿalā sī belqāsem / lā ghnāsh
tbarred dhik-essamm / tuktublī jōz sṭār*

I collapsed there, before them. Exhausted, I appealed to Sī Belqāsem: "I beg you cure my illness, write me a couple of sentences."

The request made here is for an amulet, which usually consists of verses from the Qurʾān placed inside a leather pouch and worn by the patient.

In contrast, the response of the *ṭālib* to the plea of this extremely sick man sounds very cruel:

قالی کتبت غالی/ واتبخر ست لیالی/ سردوک ابیظوعالی/ هو یقلع ذي العقار

*Qālli kutubti ghālī / wetbakhkhar sit layālī / sardūk abyaz we ʿālī /
huwa yeqlaʿ dhī l-ʿeqār*

He replied: "My writing is costly; burn incense for six nights,
slaughter a big, white rooster, and your affliction will then be
over."

The scene presents two contrasting attitudes: materialism versus spiritualism, and cruelty versus compassion. The collapsing traveler is not given the help that is expected from the *ṭulbā*, which should have been their spontaneous reaction in this situation. To make matters worse, the first words uttered mention the high cost of the intervention, with a conditional tone to them, and we later learn the recommended 'prescription' does not help the patient, whose condition instead deteriorates.

The final stop in the narrator's odyssey is the house of an educated man, who recommends the right cure. At the end, it is enlightened science, in the form of modern medicine, that wins:

قلت أنا نبري فنتاوي / مل كتبة هذي فاضي / رحت لسى قويدر البرازي / إللي عندو كم
من عقار

*Qult anā nibrā fanṭāzī / mil-kitba hādhī fazī / ruḥt lsī Qwayder el-
Barāzī / ellī ʿindū kam min ʿeqār*

I was determined to recover with modern medicine. These amulets I
did not want any more. I went to Sī Qwaydar al-Barāzī, who has
some medications.

Although it is not unusual for patients to undertake arduous journeys to reach the *wālī* or *wālis* of their choice, it is doubtful that anyone in the narrator's serious condition would have held out, and in such good spirits. A truly sick person would probably have died before traveling the distance covered by the poet/narrator. Yet this ill man is said to have walked the whole day, then traveled by train, and walked again looking for a *ṭālib* to alleviate his suffering. In the meanwhile, he had lost half his weight, fever was burning his body, his feet had swollen, and there was pain in his toenails. This man who should normally be almost immobilized is said to have run to meet his family!

The poet/narrator's illness quickly fades away, revealing the real patient in the story, Algeria, ill-served by a section of the religious community. It soon becomes clear that the fever is feigned and serves only as a stratagem leading to the true message of the poem, shedding light on some of the social ills of

the country. An enthusiast of progress, °Alilī opts for a modern path and a serious effort to cleanse society of deleterious traditions perpetuated by *ṭulbā* and marabouts. He even uses French expressions, “vas-y” and “fantaisie,” to mark the shift from traditional to modern medicine.

Al-Ḥummā fi Bū Ḥalwān is a pernicious satire, aimed at a segment of society, namely corrupt *ṭulbā* and marabouts, who instead of serving their fellow Algerians exploit them in the name of Islam.

Two technical tools are at play in this poem, exaggeration and satire, conveying a bipolar message. Hyperbolic by nature, colloquial Arabic—and Algerian colloquial is no exception—serves here to illustrate the gravity of the narrator's health. The poet uses a natural human inclination to exaggerate one's afflictions in order to elicit pity and attract both attention and sympathy.

°Alilī is obviously bent on creating a dramatic effect through a crescendo of action. The lengthy journey is intended to show convincingly that the patient's rejection of traditional medicine and its agents was not a hasty decision. Rather, it was the result of endless efforts to follow the path of traditional medicine, at the risk of endangering his health in the process. He appealed to a specific *wālī*—“*nuṭlob fi sīdī warār*” (‘imploring Sīdī Warār’)—and visited a number of others:

ظليت أنا نمشي/ بين المغرب والعشي/ نلحق سيدي عكاشة/ هو يطفى ذو لظرار.
ذاك اليوم أنهار السبت/ وعلى بو حلوان فايت/ للرياشة ثم تدهريت/ نطلب في مولاي زكار

...
رحت أنا نجري لهفان/ نطلب في سيدي سرحان/ صبت ثم سيتر/ في الموتور قذات النار

*Ḍallayt anā nimshī / bayn el-maghreb wel°shā / nelḥaq sīdī °akāsha /
huwa yeffī dhū ladhrār*

*Dhāk el-yōm nhār es-sabt / we °alā Bū Ḥalwān fāyet / lilryāsha tham
tdahrabt / nuṭlob fi mūlāy zakkār*

...
*Ruḥt anā nijrī lahfān / nuṭlob fi sīdī sarḥān / šibt tham sīter / fil mōtōr
qdāt en-nār*

I went on walking from sunset to nightfall, trying to reach Sīdī

°Ukāsha, who could soothe my suffering.

It was on a Saturday, while crossing Bū Ḥalwān, that I landed near
the semaphore, invoking Mūlāy Zakkār [Sīdī °Abd al-Qādir].

...
With great eagerness I moved. I implored Sīdī Sarḥān's help. Soon I
saw a Citroën with its engine running.

Gradually, the poet builds up compassion for the sick man and frees him

of the possibility of blame, having shown his numerous trials at seeking the *wālis*' help. The poet neither ridicules the traditional beliefs nor sheds doubt on the *ṭulbā*'s practices, but lets the facts speak for themselves, revealing the failure of their medicine to cure the patient. He thus shifts the responsibility for condemnation to his audience, while he lurks in the corner, a silent observer. His attitude recalls that of Bayram al-Tūnīsī in "il-Balādī," described as "both near/empathetic and distant/ironizing" (Booth 1990: 239).

Muḥammad bin al-Ṭayyib ʿAlilī, a Salafī?

Al-Ḥummā fī Bū Ḥalwān is a denunciation of saint worship, discouraged in Sunni Islam and yet practiced by many. People seeking material or moral help, or both, appeal to *wālis* for their presumed miraculous powers. The poet identifies the *wālis* in his region by their true names: Sīdī Warār, Sīdī ʿUkāsha (a marabout whose tomb is located in Bū Ḥalwān), Mūlāy Zakkār, and Sīdī al-Shaykh bin al-Dīn, the founder of a religious brotherhood in the fifteenth century in the region of al-Bayyīd, south of Oran (Wahran). One cannot but wonder, in view of the open criticism of saint worship expressed throughout the poem whether the poet was acting on his own, or if he was echoing the efforts of the members of the Association of Muslim ʿUlama to combat such practice as part of their *salafī* beliefs. The core of the *salafī* movement (founded by Muḥammad ʿAbduh, 1849–1905) is a return to a purer Islam as it was practiced during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Companions, and an attempt to cleanse it of a number of animistic practices that have burdened it throughout the centuries. Saint worship was also exploited by the colonial administration in Algeria, which took advantage of its popularity to further some of its own policies.

ʿAlilī's main preoccupation in this polysemous poem is the future of his country and his fear that it may be held back by outmoded traditions and beliefs. His indirect message is a call for his compatriots to extract themselves from the dark alleys of ignorance and follow the well lit path of modern technology. The seemingly childish and naive enthusiasm for the car and the train in *al-Ḥumma fī Bū Ḥalwān* reflects the poet's position in favor of progress.

Reversal of Fortune

The *ṭulbā* long enjoyed the respect and admiration of the Algerian population because among their few other skills, they could decipher the Arabic alphabet and teach children the rudiments of the language and religion. The *ṭulbā*'s involvement in religious studies won them the people's esteem, as well as their moral and material support. Without them, children would have been deprived of basic education and religious teachings. Yet unless the families sent their children to the *zāwiya*, the *ṭulbā* would be unemployed

and face starvation, since they were paid in kind for their services. There was therefore an interdependence of the two groups that sealed their fates in a special way, the *ṭulbā* being in the more vulnerable position. Their importance was slowly eroding, for various reasons. On the one hand the teaching centers were located primarily in agricultural areas, where the *ṭulbā* usually lost their students in bad crop seasons and were therefore deprived of their means of subsistence. When people could hardly feed themselves they had nothing to spare for donations to their children's teachers: "It was enough to have a slightly weaker harvest to bring about the cancelation of as modest a luxury as the subsistence of a *ṭālib*" (Turin 1971: 235). Another source of support to which *ṭulbā* and the *zāwīyas* generally turned in moments of dire financial conditions was the *awqāf* (endowments for charitable purposes), known as the *ḥabūs* in Algeria. This major source of subsistence and support for charitable organizations was destroyed when the French expropriated the *ḥabūs* properties in an effort to weaken the brotherhoods. However, the most serious threat for the *ṭulbā* was the colonial administration, who blamed them, rightly or wrongly, for fomenting a spirit of revolt among the children and teaching them to hate the occupier. The accusations were formulated in unambiguous terms: "Almost all the *ṭulbā* in charge of the education of the children among the tribes are fanatic and ignorant, and it is among them that the strongest opposition to our ideas takes place" (quoted in Turin 1971: 218).

The *ṭulbā* were therefore the subject of a defamation campaign launched by a colonial administration more concerned about anti-colonial feelings than the education of Algerian children. The intention of the colonial administration was to draw Algerian children to the world of French culture and to dispose them favorably toward occupation by exposing them to French education.

As a result of the changing cultural scene, the *ṭulbā* struggled to survive, some practicing honorable professions, others falling victim to lives of illicit behavior, breaching many of the laws of Islam. As we might have expected, their downfall echoed in folk culture. The following proverb gives some insight into their situation:

الطالب إلكي عوكننا عليه لقيناه فالتافرنا يسكر

Eṭ-ṭāleb ellī 'awwalnā 'lih lgināh fit-tāvernā yeskar

The *ṭālib* on whom we counted was drinking in the tavern.

Though not the only Muslims to drink alcohol, the *ṭulbā*, given their religious background, were held to higher standards.

Another proverb summarizes the fate of the fallen *ṭulbā* in these words:

الطالب إذا جاع يولكي نقّاش والي مداح

Eṭ-ṭāleb edhā jāc yewallī naqqāsh wallā maddāh

A hungry *ṭālib* writes talismans or becomes a *maddāh*.

After decades of relentless efforts and numerous reports, the colonial administration succeeded in turning the tide in its favor, imposing an educational system that served its goals. The norms of Algerian society had also changed, viewing work as a source of dignity, and consequently considered an unemployed *ṭālib* to be a parasite unworthy of respect.

Whatever the reasons, the position of the *ṭulbā* was shaken seriously. A major blow to their role as educators came with the establishment of modern schools, even in remote areas of the country, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It was, however, the decision of the Algerian parents at the beginning of the twentieth century to send their children to French schools after decades of opposition to the study of French that most weakened the position of the *ṭulbā*. This younger generation had realized by then the importance of the colonizer's language as a guarantor of livelihood.

French or Arabic?

The deep impact of the colonial education system on the minds of Algerian youth can be measured by the slow pace of cultural decolonization underway in Algeria since independence in 1962. The issue encompasses more than a people's choice of a primary language, going well beyond altercations between francophones and arabophones. The mental alienation of the intellectuals, in particular, left the Algerians floating between two identities, not belonging wholly to either. Once the Algerians stood firm on their soil, free of the colonial presence, their search for an identity did not materialize into a clear definition. Furthermore, their vacillation between education systems and their inability to sever economic and cultural links with France, "cette marâtre [this wicked stepmother]" (Dib 1968: 180), reflect the complexity of the issue.

For many years after independence a battle raged between the francophones and the arabophones, each group presenting its linguistic choice as the best suited to serve the country's interests. Much lingering resentment toward the proponents of French culture, who were viewed, rightly or wrongly, as having benefited from the colonial administration, surfaced during this period.

French-educated Algerians who were defending their livelihood by advocating the continued use of French in the education system faced a dilemma. By opposing Arabic, they were opposing the language of the Qur'ān, appearing very close to taking a sacrilegious position. Those who dared to speak out were shunned by those opposed to the continued use of French in the post-

independence period. Some writers lived in self-imposed exile, the majority residing in France. Others adopted more conciliatory attitudes, like Rachid Boudjedra who resorted to a practical solution by having his novels published in Arabic and French almost simultaneously. The novelist Malek Haddad on the other hand, chose total silence over a life in linguistic exile, soon after his country's independence.

The debate over language was not fruitless, however, and brought about a change in the literary scene, marking a turning point in the mental process of Algerian intellectuals. Kateb Yacine produced a play in Algerian dialect, *Mohammed, prends ta valise* ('Muḥammad, grab your suitcase,' 1970–71), while Djebbar, in *Ombre sultane* (1987), and Boudjedra, in *La Prise de Gibraltar / Ma°rakat al-zuqāq* ('The conquest of Gibraltar,' 1987), infused their French texts with Arabic terms and expressions and borrowed their subject matter from Arab–Islamic culture and history. Also returning to their cultural roots, writers of Berber origin revived their language and culture, and gave their works written in French a different personality.

Rhyme in al-Ḥumma fi Bū Ḥalwān

Structurally this poem is identical to *al-Qadūm* and *al-Rawz*. Each verse has four hemistichs, with a triple rhyme on the first three, a a a, the last hemistich, b, carrying the end rhyme for the whole poem (25 lines) and consisting of the long vowel *alif* followed by *rā* (ا). Maintaining the long vowel before the consonant throughout the poem grounds the verses and gives them weight. It is a real tour de force for the poet to be consistent in the end rhyme in view of the many distorted French words in the poem. °Alilī sacrifices the unity of the meter for the sake of the meaning, but though the rhyme bounces in some of the verses, the inner rhythm saves the poem and contributes to the fast flow of the words. The style is very prosaic. As in the two previous poems, the *baḥr* (meter) is broken, with the predominant form being: *fa°lun fa°lun ma°ūlān*. It is not a monorhymed poem, however. Other examples of the meter used in this poem are: *fa°lun ma°ūlun* (in the verse, *Dhāk el-yōm nhār es-sabt / we °alā Bū Ḥalwān fāyet / lilryāsha tham tdahrabt / nuṭlob fi mūlāy zakkār*); and *fa°lun fa°lun ma°ūl* (in the verse, *Hadhā lmarad mtayyeh nuṣṣi / mwassed ghayr burnūṣi / we °alā ṭulbā thamma nṣaqṣi / welli yekhdem °abd en-nār*).

Arab Versus Berber

Bidūn °Unwān: Ethnic Tensions

Racial relations between Arabs and Berbers in Algeria have been characterized by tension since the Arab conquest of the country in 647 CE. This tension

is reflected in a number of popular proverbs, but the one that best portrays the underlying feelings of the two groups toward each other is the following example, aimed primarily at stressing the importance of quick thinking and mental alertness:

العربي من غمزة والقبائلي من دبزة

El-ʿarbī min ghamza, wel-qbāyli min dabza

For the Arab a hint is enough, but the Kabyle needs a punch.

Literally, however, the word *ghamza* means a wink of an eye, indicating speed. The implication here is the preference for a sharp mind, the ability to understand meaning quickly, which in popular culture is synonymous with a clever person, one who does not need lengthy, detailed explanations in order to understand. This is in fact the key to the genre of the proverb, where meaning is packed in a minimum of words.

Very flexible, the same proverb is repeated with variations, depending on the identities of the victim and the victimizer, adapting to the needs of the moment. In a different version, it reflects the tension between the various Berber groups, particularly the Kabyle and the Shawiya, whom the Kabyle consider inferior to them:

القبائلي من غمزة والشاوي من دبزة

El-qbāyli min ghamza, wesh-shāwī min dabza

For the Kabyle a hint is enough, but the Shawī needs a punch.

Free of ethnic and racial connotations, the proverb celebrates merely alert minds and the capacity for quick understanding, as revealed in the following version:

الحر من غمزة والبهيم من دبزة

El-ḥurr min ghamza, wel-bhīm min dabza

For the noble man a hint is enough, but the brute needs a punch.

The term *ḥurr* is used in Algerian dialect to mean the white, free man in opposition to the black slave, called *wsif*. In its figurative meaning, however, *ḥurr* refers to a noble and generous person.

There are echoes of this racial tension in the poem *Bidūn °unwān*, where the topic is presented as a farce. The Berbers ridiculed in the poem are those living in the region of Jabal al-Dahrā (extending from Shirshāl [Cherchell] to Mustaghānim). They are derided for their pretentious claim to knowledge and understanding of foreign languages. The poet concocted a situation where the host, a Kabyle, and his guest, a high ranking administrator, referred to here as *khalifa* (a term normally used only for the leader of the Islamic nation, but meant here as an expression of profound respect), engage in a dialogue that is nothing less than a series of ludicrous quid pro quos, betraying their limited knowledge of the foreign language they are using.

الا ييجي الخليفة بهدر له حديث قياس / يواجبه هو بالكيفية
مسيو الخليفة ما يشنغاسر / تبدا الفهامة تجيه شوية
الاغاد فلي قاييس ليغاس / ييدا يفصل في الرومية

Ellā yiji lkhliḥfa yehdarlu ḥadīth qyās / yewājbo huwa bilkānghiyya
Mesyū lkhliḥfa mā yeshinghāser / tībdā lfhāma tjiḥ shwayya
El-āghād filli qāyes lighās / yebdā yefaṣṣel fir-rūmiyya

When the Khalifa visits, he talks wisely to him and honors him
speaking Kabyle.

The Khalifa, I do not know how, understands what he tells him.
Believe me, I heard his explanations in French.

The words used in the first hemistich of the third verse are spoken in Berber. It is part of °Alili's humorous imitation to poke fun at the Kabyle portrayed in the poem as a stupid person performing nonsensical chores, revealing his total ignorance. An example is his effort to make a *shāshiyya* (turban) with chaff—"min el-qrašh yeṣna° shāshiyya."

The poet, who uses Arabized French terms rather sparingly in his other poems, indulges himself in *Bidūn °unwān*, incorporating distorted French words in imitation of the Kabyle when using French terms such as *tiligen* (intelligent) and *misyū* (monsieur), which he reproduces the way they were pronounced locally. Demeaning nicknames like *Bū Rdūsa* ('he who falls') and *Bū °Fās* ('he who is trampled') appear in this poem, shedding light on the lack of consideration of one group for the other. This poem in its underlying unkind sentiments echoes an Algerian proverb that refers to an annoying conversational habit of the Kabyles:

ما أحلى حديث لقبایل کان ما جأوش يعاودوه

Mā ḥlā ḥadīth leqbāyel kān mā jāwsh ye°āwdūh

The conversation of the Kabyles is pleasant, if only they did not repeat themselves.

°Alili criticizes the Kabyle's false claim to knowledge in matters related to agriculture, too. Pushing the raillery to the extreme, he describes the Kabyle farmer as completely stupid, fertilizing even the top of his tent!

يغلق السوايح كم افلاس / فوق الخيام ثان يزيد شوية

Yeghleq es-swāyeh kam qlās / fōq lkhyām thān yezīd shwayya

When he fertilizes he covers the whole place, the roofs of the tents as well!

As for generosity, it is not one of the Kabyle traits; on the rare occasions it occurs, it confuses people:

نفاق في اللحم حارت فيه الناس / كيقرن العام يذبح حولية

Nfāq fi lḥam ḥāret fih en-nās / kiyeqren el-°ām yedhbah ḥūliyya

He distributes meat generously, leaving people perplexed, for the new year he slaughtered a lamb.

Rhyme in Bidūn °Unwān

Bidūn °unwān is an isometric short poem (10 verses) with a double rhyme, as the first hemistich of each verse rhymes with that of the following verses, while the end rhyme is rather weak, achieved through a combination of words ending in *tā' marbūṭa* and unstressed long vowel *alif*. The first hemistich is the work of a master, as the rhyme in *sīn* preceded by a long vowel *alif* (اس) reproduces a frequent sound in the Kabyle dialect, adding thus an auditory dimension to the comical effect °Alili wants to create in ridiculing this Berber group.

The Kabyle Myth

The light-hearted and at times cruel nature of *Bidūn °unwān*, whether in the form of an amusing imitation of Kabyle speech or in comparing their intelligence to that of a cow—*el-fhāma ghayr bhāl afūnās*—is a cover-up for the subtle antagonism between Arabs and Berbers, as previously mentioned. The colonial administration was aware of the unfriendly relationship between the two communities and took advantage of it. In a country where the inhabitants

professed one religion, Islam, the colonizer used ethnicity to implement its divide-and-rule policy. When the French officers of the Bureaux Arabes understood that "the Kabyle hated the Arab and the Arab hated the Kabyle" (Daumas 1853: 173), they exploited the situation by giving the Kabyles preferential treatment. Essays were written explaining their superior intelligence, and theories on their European origin abounded. The process resulted in the "appearance of a true Kabyle myth" (Ageron 1980: 64).

Daumas devoted a large portion of his book, *Mœurs et coutumes de l'Algérie*, to a detailed study of the Kabyle population, of their traditions and their social relations. He was particularly fascinated by the power of the marabouts over their followers, a discovery that pushed the intelligence officers to rally them to their ranks. They constituted potentially a powerful voice to promote colonial policy and provide a means to control the closely knit population under their authority. Daumas explained their strong hold over their followers: "It is said that highlanders would not hesitate to slaughter their children if they received an order from a marabout. The name of God invoked by the victim of a mugging would not save him, whereas that of a revered marabout would" (1853: 160).

Throughout his book Daumas talks about the Kabyles with admiration and respect, a sentiment absent in his study of the Arabs in the same book. He found similarities between Kabyle customs and French punitive laws: "In relation to a number of very important matters, such as the repression of theft, murder, etc., their statutes do not agree with those of the Qur'ān. They seem to bend more toward our ideas in terms of the penal code" (173).

Preparing the ground for what would later become a highly contentious subject among historians, namely the origin of the Berbers, Daumas establishes one that best serves the interests of French colonialism. Describing the rules that govern Kabyle social relations, he writes: "In fact, those statutes bear a name that serves admirably the seal of their Christian origin. They are called Qānūn ['canons']" (174). According to the author, the Islam of the Kabyle is only skin deep because "the more we dig in this old trunk, the more Christian sap we find under the Muslim bark" (160). Armed with this same conviction, serious efforts were made by Monsignor Lavigerie in the second half of the nineteenth century (1863–70) to convert the Kabyles to Christianity. They did not succeed.

The Berbers were, in fact, considered by the French to be intellectually superior to the Arabs and received minor privileges that contributed merely to inflaming their relationships with Arab Algerians rather than ameliorating their lot.

This scientifically unfounded concept of superior intelligence was constantly contrasted with the 'dullness' of the Arabs, and with time it became accepted as fact. The historian Jules Roy wrote extensively on Algeria, describing the stereotyping of Arab Algerians, who were usually identified as "a dirty race," "good for nothing . . . resistant to any social progress" (1960: 23). He

explains that he reached adulthood before this notion was finally corrected: "I was greatly astonished when I gradually realized that the fig tree trunks were human beings capable of feeling noble sentiments. A simplistic discovery? My compatriots in Algeria who are not heartless did not make it" (23).

We may surmise that this openly biased attitude in favor of the Kabyle contributed to some degree to the deterioration of relations between Arabs and Berbers in Algeria. It explains the ridiculing of the Kabyle by other groups, who attacked them for the very same characteristics the French praised most in them, their presumed superior intelligence. In a certain way, 'Alili's verbal attack on the Kabyle, portraying them as stupid, was also meant for their patrons, the French, thus constituting an act of double revenge. The opening verse of *Bidūn 'unwān* conveys this sentiment:

عام القبائل فاتو رياس / تبروقت فيه قاع الدنيا
الفهامة غير بحال «أفوناس» / غير مضمند وزيد وغناية

‘Ām el-qbāyel fātū ruyyās / tbarwaqat fih gā‘ ed-dunyā
El-fhāma ghayr bhāl afūnās / ghayr maḍmaḍ we zayd wegħnāya

The year the Kabyles became chiefs the whole world was decorated.
They are as intelligent as a cow with a yoke resting on a pillow.

Regardless of the spirit that motivated the French attitude toward the Kabyle, the Algerian Arabs considered this policy a clear sign of favoritism, a perception reinforced by the comportment of some Kabyle. In the early years of colonization, the first contingent of volunteers to be recruited by the French to fight on their side were Zwāwa Kabyles, better known as *zouaves* (Hadj-Sadok 1973: 21).

It is against this background that 'Alili's poem *Bidūn 'unwān* must be viewed. While denigrating the linguistic skills of the Kabyles, the largest of the Berber groups, 'Alili tried to reveal the extent of the colonial administration's influence on them. It is doubtful that the Kabyles were aware of the colonizer's true intentions and motivations. Nonetheless, by continuing to copy the mannerisms and style of the French, they set themselves up as fair game for sneers and jibes. The proverbs cited earlier reveal the sentiments of the Algerians who disapproved of the Kabyle comportment.

It is somewhat ironic that the golden period for race relations in Algeria was during the years of the war of independence (1956–62). Fighting a common enemy, the Algerian people put away their differences and formed a united front. Once the fighting ended and the country regained its independence, the old antagonism between Berbers and Arabs resurfaced, revealing the lingering effect of the colonial policy of favoritism toward the Berbers.

The Poems of Weakness

The Poet and French Colonialism

The colonial administration's interest in folklore placed the study of Algerian folk heritage generally in an odd position, as folklorists, regardless of their motivations, became suspect. The field remained controversial long after the country's independence in 1962. The manipulation of folklore constituted a trend in French colonial policy and was practiced in various Maghribi countries. According to Webber, a similar situation prevailed in Tunisia, where "the control of folklore became part of the colonizer's booty," adding that "folklore data were 'used' by colonialists to portray North African Arabo-Berber culture as picturesque, shallow, barbaric, or rebellious, inferior to Western culture" (1991: 202).

Though never blatantly anti-French, °Alilī's poetry bears a latent spirit of revolt. The political undercurrents in his poems and their subtle and often oblique criticism of the foreign occupation are well camouflaged. Only an intertextual reading of the poems can reveal the poet's anti-colonial sentiments and his desire to see the end of French domination of his country. °Alilī's denouncement of colonialism is hidden beneath the layers of metaphors and allegories, visible only through the indirect stabs he takes at the foreign power. His anger is primarily directed at his compatriots, who through their conduct, holding to outmoded customs and traditions, contributed to the state of decline in which they lived, while their oppressors marked major technological advances. His anger at his society's lack of moral integrity is clearly formulated in his tribute poems to Hadj-Sadok. There, we encounter also the only example of a friendly disposition vis-à-vis France (quoted in chapter three), as he expresses his gratitude to the governor of Algeria, Naegelen, whose office granted him financial help.

Bāyet fī °Afrūn: Seeking a Wālī

This poem reveals °Alilī's most openly anti-colonial attitude and sheds light on another side of his personality, one that the poems of strength do not show. This subdued and otherwise stoic man reveals a different side of himself, as he bitterly complains of health problems and poor lodging conditions on a visit to °Afrūn. A sick and weak °Alilī finds himself, on a cold night, sleeping in an uncomfortable room, his ailing health deteriorating due to the poor quality of his hotel, which he describes in this verse:

راني في حبس، كاشو والا سيلول/ والمضغة في الضروس ما فيها بنة

Rānī fī ḥabs, kāshō wellā silūl / wel-maḍgha fiḍ-ḍrūs mā fihā benna

My room is like a prison, a solitary jail, a cell. Food is tasteless under my teeth.

The poet/narrator's psychological strength has clearly dwindled in this poem. 'Alili appears to be suffering from an ailment and has difficulty walking down the stairs:

هودت مع الدروج والركبة مخلوج

Hawwadt ma^c drūj wer-rukba makhlūj

I went down the stairs, my knee was shaking.

His poor health plunges him into a state of depression, driving him to tears:

بايت في عفرون راني كالمهبول / ودموعي كالعين تجري هو طالة

Bāyet fī °Afrūn rānī kilmahbūl / wedmū°i kil°ayn tijrī hūṭāla

Sleeping in °Afrūn drove me crazy, / My tears flowed like a gushing spring.

Psychologically broken and physically weak, he is not prepared to be conciliatory toward a European woman whom he feels compelled to greet. The situation triggers his anti-colonial feelings:

Wen-bāye° lil°lūj, °edyān nabīnā

ونبايع للعلوج، عديان نبينا

I greeted a foreigner, enemy of our Prophet.

The poet's choice of the word °lūj is significant, as it means 'white slave' in the Algerian dialect. It has both a semantic and a psychological dimension, as it refers to the European settlers, generally white-skinned. Facing them with a double religious and political animosity, the poet is aggravated by the need to be civil and to acknowledge those he does not seem to like. Although he resents their position of dominance in his country he feels compelled to show them some consideration.

°Alili's presence in °Afrūn may have been due to a number of reasons: he may have been seeking treatment for his aches and pains in Muzāya's spas or perhaps he was on the lookout for a temporary job, like many other workers in the region who went to the Mitija region for this purpose. His bad mood and general feeling of dejection were the result of either his failure to obtain

work, even for a day or two, or his deteriorating health, or both. Disappointed and in pain, he lacked his usual joviality to endure hardships, and his intolerance toward the *colons* resurfaced.

The poet/narrator's condition is compounded by his distorted sense of identity, an Algerian parading as a European, wearing Western clothes (the cape was worn by the French military) perhaps purchased in a flea market:

لا بـس كبـوط، خـاطري مـنـو مـشـطـون/ لا عـبـاية لا لثـام، دـاير شـاشـية

Lābes kabūt, khāṭrī minnō mashṭūn / lā °abāya lā lthām, dāyer shāshiyya

I am wearing a cape, it is the cause of my sadness. I am not wearing a °abāya [traditional narrow dress] nor a *lithām* [fabric for turban], my head is covered with a *shāshiyya*.

His outfit does not win him the respect and consideration reserved for the *colons*, as already explained by the poet al-Aḥmadi in *Šūra min šuwar* . . . , where he describes the preference of the Algerian merchants for the *colons*. This realization might have triggered °Alilī's anger.

It is this depressive condition that marks the beginning of °Alilī's attitude reversal, seeking help in domains that he had previously shunned. He appeals to Sīdī Ya°qūb for help as he finds himself afflicted and probably alone in Blīda, far from his home town:

جـيناكـم هـدة يا نـاس البـليـدة/ وـدـعوة سـيـدكـم جـامـدة عـلى قـلب عـدونا
سـيـدي يـعقـوب غـيـثـني، رـاني مـغـصـوب/ وـعـندك فـضل الشـبـوب مـنه تـسـقـينا

*Jinākum hadda, yā nās el-Blīda / we da°wet sīdkum jāmda °alā qalb
°adūnā*

*Sīdī Ya°qūb ghīṭhnī, rānī maghṣūb / we °endak faḍl eshbūb, minno
tisqīnā*

We came to you in all haste, people of Blīda. May your patron's invocation destroy our enemy.

Help me, Sīdī Ya°qūb, I am in straits. You have the elixir of youth, let me drink from it.

To all appearances, the man who manifested exceptional endurance and a sense of humor in the earlier poems—*al-Rawz*, *al-Qādūm*, *al-Ḥumma fī Bū Ḥalwān*, and *Bidūn °unwān*—shows little patience for more illness and suffering. His outlook on life is pessimistic and his judgment is somewhat off-balance, causing him to reverse his position against saint-worship. Morally

broken and disoriented, he invokes *Sidī Yaʿqūb*, patron saint of the city of Blida, to come to his rescue. A sense of liminality hovers over the poet's actions in this poem, as the strong man of *al-Ḥumma fī Bū Ḥalwān* bears no resemblance to the shaky protagonist of *Bāyet fī ʿAfrūn*!

ʿAlilī's painful experience in ʿAfrūn made him question the meaning of his life and the status of colonialism in his country. Particularly significant are three more or less synonymous words used in the poem: *ḥabs*, *kāshō*, and *sīlūl*. They form a semantic strategy used to convey the sense of turpitude endured by the poet and his colonized compatriots, experiencing life like an imprisonment as a result of the numerous restrictions imposed upon them by the French administration, which robbed them of their freedom in their own country.

Rhyme in Bāyet fī ʿAfrūn

Bāyet fī ʿAfrūn adopts the isometric form, consisting of two hemistichs and a single rhyme achieved with either a *tāʾ marbūʿa* or an unstressed *alif*. Some of the first hemistichs have an inner rhyme as well, as in:

Bakkart maʿ eṣ-ṣbāḥ wen-nejma qsāḥ بكرت مع الصباح والنجمة قساح

I woke up early, the morning star was shining in the sky.

or :

Jinākum hadda yā nās el-Blīda جيناكم هدة يا ناس البلدية

We came to you in all haste, people of Blida.

The second hemistich, however, does not present any of this inner rhyme and seems to struggle to achieve the end rhyme, as if the emotions of the poet/narrator, who is suffering from an unspecified ailment and is morally depressed, interfere with the rhyme of this rather short poem (7 lines). He does not seem to be in control of his diction the way he was in the previous poems. The abundance of French words may have interfered with the rhyme, as well. Had the poet avoided the repetition of the words *cachot* and *cellul*, both synonymous with prison, and used the passive participle *maḥbūs* ('imprisoned') instead of *fī ḥabs* ('in a prison'), the first hemistich would have rhymed with *eḍ-drūs* in the second hemistich.

This poem carries a very simple rhyme, but like the other poems of the collection it lacks consistency and has no uniformity in the meter. The latter varies from one verse to the other, giving us either: *faʿlun mafʿūlān faʿlun mafʿūlān* or *faʿlun faʿlun mafʿūl*.

It is obvious from the preceding comments on rhyme in °Alilī's poetry that his technique has serious weaknesses. Yet in spite of the broken feet and the freedom he took in the use of the meter, his poems cannot be classified as doggerel verse. They have unique artistic qualities that endow them with a certain charm and appeal. As the rhythmic flow is preserved throughout his poems, it provides musicality, speed, and a propulsive movement that helps the action.

This survey of °Alilī's poetry reveals that he is artistically at his best in his happy mood. The panegyric poems he wrote in honor of Hadj-Sadok, where he gives free course to his complaints, reinforce this assessment, as the metaphors and images used there lack the spontaneity and originality witnessed in his other poems.

The Legend of Sīdī Ya°qūb

The invocation of Sīdī Ya°qūb is of special significance here as he played an important role in protecting the Andalusian immigrants to Algeria who fled Spain around the end of the fifteenth century and settled in Blīda. According to the legend, these immigrants were subjected to continuous raids by the Berbers living in the region up to the time that Sīdī Ya°qūb stopped in Blīda, on his way back to Spain from Mecca, in the sixteenth century. He placed the inhabitants of the district of Wlād al-Sultān in Blīda—where most Andalusian immigrants lived—under his protection. His generous and courageous gesture landed him the position of great wālī of Blīda, known also by the name Sīdī Aḥmad al-Kabīr. Like the Andalusian immigrants who once found solace and protection from the attacks of their Berber aggressors, °Alilī was seeking Sīdī Ya°qūb's *baraka* (blessing) to help him endure and survive his ordeals.

There is a clear parallel between the Berber aggressors in the legend of Sīdī Ya°qūb and the *colons* in the poem, as both assumed the role of victimizers. °Alilī must have felt as vulnerable as the Andalusian immigrants did in the past, and his sole support in this situation is the patron saint of Blīda. The *colons* did in fact oppose the enactment of laws favorable to Algerians: their intransigence was dictated by a feeling of superiority over the Algerians and a reluctance to see the 'Arabs' become their equals. They played a notorious role in prolonging the atrocities of the war of independence through the activities of the OAS. Formed of armed civilians and military opposed to the independence of Algeria, the OAS conducted a campaign of terror, killing many innocent civilians. One of its victims was the well-known novelist Mouloud Feraoun. Ironically, he had promoted coexistence in his writings while trying to make sense of the bloody events of the war of independence.

Al-Wagfa: The Reversal

Al-Wagfa, literally meaning 'the pause,' refers to the absence of rain—or simply, drought. This weather condition gives the poet an opportunity to ponder

on the misery of the Algerian farmers who were reduced to extreme poverty and suffered humiliation as a result of the confiscation of their lands by the colonial authority.

In dire financial difficulties, the Algerians were facing yet another hardship that would undoubtedly bring on them the crows of poverty. Facing a natural disaster, 'Alilī, a peasant with no savings to fall back on, like the majority of the Algerian farmers at that time, had only one recourse: prayer. He invokes God's help: *'ālem el-ghayb* ('Knower of the unknown'); and the Prophet's intercession: *ṣāḥeb esh-shaʿa* ('the Mediator'), as well as that of the Angels. It is his long list of *wālis* and saints that is astonishing, as he is imploring here the same traditional religious authorities he mercilessly scoffed at in *al-Ḥumma fī Bū Ḥalwān*.

His first appeal is to his past enemies, the *ṭulbā*:

المسلمين في غلبة/ يا أهل النبوة/ والطلبة / أهل التفسير
تنفوا ذا النحسة/ بالعلم والجلسة/ بجاه بن موسى / أو بركة البشير
انزوروا البودالا/ أهل العلم والحالة/ وامصايح نشالا/ أو برهانهم غزير
انزوروا الأوليا/ أهل السر والنية/ في كل ثانية/ وقبابهم بالجير

El-muslimin fī ghalba / yā ahl en-nūba / wiṭ-ṭulbā / ahl et-tafsīr
Tinfū dhā n-naḥsa / bil-ʿelm wel-jalsa / bi jāh bin Mūsā / ū baraket
el-Bashīr
Nzūrū l-būdālā / ahl el-ʿilm wel-ḥālā / wemṣābiḥ nshālā / ū
burhānhum ghzīr
Nzūrūl-awliyā / ahl es-sirr wen-niyya / fī kul thāniya / we qbābhum biljīr

The Muslims are suffering, O saints of our region! O *ṭulbā*! You who explain the texts.

Put an end to our bad luck with science and prayer sessions, with Bin Mūsā's intercession and the blessings of al-Bashīr.²⁶

We will visit the mystics, men of knowledge and faith. Their light will burn forever, their proofs are infinite.²⁷

We will visit the *wālis*, holders of secrets and evidence. At every mountain turn their plaster mausoleums appear.

These verses give the impression of being part of a return trip the poet/narrator took physically and mentally on the train he rode in his feverish state to *Bū Ḥalwān*. Here, he is a converted reformer, anguished by a concern different from the one that assailed him in the previous poem. The tragedy in *al-Wagfa* is national and threatens people's livelihood, 'Alilī's included. Yet the ideological reversal is so drastic that it gives the impression of a split personality, as the sudden confidence in the *ṭulbā*'s capacity to interpret the religious

texts and to intervene to end the drought is a surprising and unexpected reaction. He is somewhat careful, however, and recommends that they defer to knowledge/science—*bil'elm*—to end the natural disaster. Desperate for rain, he makes vows, promising to visit saints' tombs. The poet/narrator appeals to traditional forces for help, the *wālīs*, the *ṭulbā*, and the marabouts. Though eager for their intercession, he appears to lack conviction in their ability to perform miracles. His vows do not spring from a sincere belief in their power. Yet he seems willing to give them a try.

The last verse summarizes the poet's true position as he establishes a parallel between the Algerians and their Christian colonizers:

ولات مستوية/ تجري في الهاوية/ ولاد رومية/ صنعوا الحديد يطير

Wallāt mistawiya / tijrī fil-hāwiya / wlād Rūmiyya / ṣana°ū el-ḥadīd yeṭīr

We are all alike, moving toward the abyss, while the children of the Rūmiyya made the metal fly.

Thus, as the Algerians were sinking deeper and deeper in poverty, the children of the Rūmiyya (the Christians) registered impressive advances and technological progress. Reference to the metal that flies is not an expression of admiration for the achievements of the French but rather a means to motivate his countrymen to follow suit, with the hope of ameliorating their standard of living. The image in this last verse puts the two communities at opposite ends of the economic spectrum, the Algerians in the abyss and the French high in the sky.

Hopelessness, suffering, and misery are portrayed in *al-Wagfa* through the image of the raven, whose feathers normally never change color yet turn gray due to these unprecedented conditions. The allegory stands for the graying of human hair as a result of trying experiences:

م الشرق للمغرب/ فيها الغراب يشيب/ ها عالم الغيب/ واتحن بالتيسير

Mish-sharq lil-maghrib / fihā lghrāb yeshīb / hā °ālem el-ghayb / wīṭhin bit-taysīr

From East to West the raven has turned gray. O Reader of the unknown, help us in our ordeal.

The choice of the raven conveys the depth of despair and suffering. The poet/narrator is intent on impressing on his people the gravity of the situation, which can lead only to one of two possibilities: survival or destruction. Finally

he places his trust in God, because God alone knows what the future holds:
 ʿālem elghayb.

Searching to remedy the severe drought in his region, the poet reverts to his ancestral traditions and seems willing to endorse anyone who would provide relief for the scorched lands and the desperate farmers. Even his tone has changed due to the gravity of the situation. He exhorts the people with the style and language of an imam, appealing to their sense of responsibility, yet talking not as an outsider but as a participant, an insider, a victim enduring their plight and sharing their fate. As a matter of fact, the catastrophe will impact everyone's life, poor and rich alike:

راهي قاع كيف كيف / عظامي وشريف / اخلاص قاع النيف / كي طايحة في البير

Rāhī gāʿ kif kif / ʿaḍā yeddi we shrif / khlāṣ gāʿ en-nīf / ki ṭāyḥa fil-bīr

It is the same everywhere, for the noble and the ignoble as well. There is no pride left for anyone who falls to the bottom of the well.

The mood that animates the poems of weakness is echoed in ʿAlilī's tributes to Hadj-Sadok. Despite the absence of dates for most of the poems, it is not impossible to conclude that the change of mood that characterizes the poems of weakness occurred after the poet's injury and ailing health. The loss of ʿAlilī's joviality appears to have resulted from his marginalization in society, as he was not needed any more and had ceased to participate in Duperré's life. Having once been an active farmer and the center of attention as an amateur *maddāḥ* in his village, the neglect must have hurt his feelings. Despondent, he poured his heart out in his verse.

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Conclusion

When the issue of the linguistic choice was debated between francophones and arabophones in post-colonial Algeria, some writers explained their use of French as a language of expression by the fact that most Algerians during the colonial period could not read and write Arabic. Folk poetry was spared this apologetic interpretation, by being the mouthpiece of the people, speaking for them and through them the language they best understand and appreciate, their colloquial language. Oral literature has the advantage over learned literature of reaching the people unhampered by the limitations of illiteracy or censorship. Muḥammad bin al-Ṭayyib °Alili has contributed to Algeria's folk heritage as interpreter of the people's dreams and aspirations and a chronicler of his society. His collection provides a vivid portrayal of rural traditions, class relations, and religious customs, and conveys the political mood of the country at a critical juncture in its history. It was a time when the tide was beginning to turn as the intensive political and social action undertaken since the mid-1920s culminated in a war of liberation that led to the independence of the country.

°Alili's poems convey the predominant sentiment of his period, echoed through his own struggles, as well as the daily battles of his fellow farmers. An excellent observer of his society, he succeeded in depicting peoples' moral and physical characteristics, exploiting them to the utmost in his verbal caricature. Although he is the major narrator of his public poems, little is revealed in them about his private life. It is in his tribute poems to Hadj-Sadok that °Alili discloses his personal feelings, showing a despondent and depressed man, desperate of ever attaining happiness, as portrayed in *al-Qādūm*. The poet's gratitude for his benefactor's kindness and generosity takes the form of flattery—recalling a well-known category in Arabic poetry, the *shi'r al-munāsabāt* ('poetry of circumstance')—which lacked the spontaneity and naturalness of his public poems. Algerian women are absent in °Alili's poetry, and so are all members of his family. Many reasons can be advanced to explain this fact, but any conclusion would be pure speculation, and this absence is in no way a reflection of a real-life situation, since Algerian rural women are involved in village life and share numerous chores with men out-

side the house. One can only assume that their exclusion was a personal choice of the poet and not a reflection of an anti-feminist position. It is more likely to do with a certain sense of privacy proper to the region. The greater surprise, however, is the limited direct presence of the colons and the poet's interactions with them. There are only faint echoes of the French presence in his poetry, such as the group of Europeans seen waiting at the railway station in *al-Ḥumma fī Bū Ḥalwān*, and a European woman mentioned in *Bāyet fī ʿAfrūn*. It is inconceivable that in a town such as Duperré, inhabited mainly by *colons*, their paths did not cross. Thus while ʿAlili's poetry entertains and informs, it provides yet another example of the valuable contribution folklore makes to our knowledge of a society, and argues in favor of efforts for the protection of every country's folk heritage.

The Poems

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The Hoe

القادوم

I have a hoe
That causes me much concern,
The suitors chase it relentlessly,
One day it disappeared from my tent.

عندي واحد القادوم
منها راني مهموم
والخطابة كل يوم
في الخيمة مانجبرهاش

I hired a town crier,
He is searching for it in the duwwār
Except in the town notables' houses,
Those who took it have not returned it.

درتلها بشار
راه يحوس في الدوار
غير الخيام الكبار
والقبضة ما ردوهاش

Sī Jallūl al-Bashshār
Said: "I will look for it in my house.
It might have fallen in the fire,
Without anyone noticing.

سي جلول البشار
قال إنحوس في الدار
بالاك راهي في النار
طاح ما شفناهاش

It is nothing but a piece of metal."
Jallūl bin Mūsā took it,
"Let me show you a prickly pear tree," he said.
"Pick its fruits early in the morning."

هذي غير نحاسة
داها جلول بن موسى
قال نوريلك عرصة
تبكر ليها بالفراش

I replied: "It whistles when it cuts."
Yeḥyāwī's son took it.²⁸
He uses it to repair the grinder,
It serves him as a chisel.²⁹

قلت في القطع تدوي
داها ولد اليعياوي
في الرحي غير يساوي
توالم له منقاش

They described it to me,
The hunter's son took it,
It was sold far away,
Lest its owner go looking for it.

اعطوني عليها اللي نعاد
داها ولد الصياد
باعوها في لبعاد
خافو مولاها فتاش

Beddār's son took it,
But he denies the charge,

داها ولد البدار
وضرب عليها ذكار

He uses it in the alleys of the mine,
It was too dark for anyone to find.

يخدم بيها في الغار
في الضلمة ما صابوهاش

Jallūl the scurfy took it,
People say he broke it at the top.
There were witnesses to his act,
He promised to reimburse me for it.

داها جلول الفرطاس
قالو كسرهما من الراس
شهدت عليه الناس
قالى ما تخسرهاش

I am saddened by its loss,
That good-for-nothing took it.
He stammers when he talks,
He is a farm agent and acts like a chief.

منها راني نتنوى
داها ذاك الهاوى
في هدرتو يتلوى
وراه كومي في لحواش

An advisor appeared,
He works with Ḥajj Qwaydar
He uses it on the threshing ground
But does not take care of it.

خرج واحد المدبر
عند الحاج قويدر
يصلح بيها غير النادر
فيها ما يتلهاش

Crying over it is killing me,
Qwaydar bin Sūka took it.
He repairs the socket of his plow with it,
If it falls he does not pick it up.

راه إكتلني غير البكا
داها قويدر بن سوكة
باش يركب السكة
إذا طاحت ما يجبرهاش

I followed its trace,
It led me to chief Bin Dāda.
With it he makes bars for a bed,
And swears never to give it back.

تتبع في القادة
حتى للقائد بن دادة
صنع مطارق للسدة
ولزم ما يقلبهاش

Fatigue is killing me,
I went to the head of the unit,
To chief ʿAbdaqa's place,
The tribes had heard about it.

راه إكتلني غير الشقا
رحت لشيوخ الفرقة
عند القايد عيدق
سمعو بيها لعراش

It is passed on from hand to hand,
It reached Zuddin.
He used it to dig clay,
But it was stuck in the mud.

تتقلب في اليدين
حتى وصلت لزدين
يحفرو بيها في الطين
في الغرسة ما جبدوهاش

Its iron is beautiful and pure,
Its handle easy to secure.
Bū Ṣūfī's son took it,
But denied it ever came his way.

حديدها زين وصافي
قبضتها قالو وافي
داها ولد البوصوفي
قالى ما لحقتناش

A crafty man took it,
He sold it to chief al-ʿAwsaj.
He gave it to his limping son,
Who cuts the grass and packs it.

داها واحد يصلوج
باعها للقاييد العوسج
أعطاهما لوليدو الأعرج
بشواريته حشاش

Anger is killing me,
We are not treated fairly.
I sought the advice of the people of ʿAṭṭāf,
This ordeal can never be forgotten.

راه إكتلني غير الزعاف
ما بغاوش يعطوني الانصاف
شورت عليها ناس العطاف
محنتها ما تتنساش

I encountered a wise man,
He told me it crossed the Brāz region.
There people fought a war with stones,
It was witnessed by the tribes.

خرجلي واحد المياز
قال لي قطعت لبراز
دارو قيرة بالياز
شهدو فيهم لعراش

They said its metal is cracked
And chief ʿAbd al-Salām took it.
He told me to keep quiet
Or I would never recover it.

حديدها قالو فلام
داها القاييد عبد السلام
قال لي بطل من الكلام
والا ما نقلابهاش

I sought the advice of a fortuneteller,
He said it was with the Banī Slimān.
They sold it to chief Mishān,³⁰
Too far for me to reach.

شاورت عليها واحد الكهان
قال لي راهي في بني سليمان
باعوها للقاييد ميشان
بعيدة ما توصلهاش

A messenger met me
In chief Bin Zitūni's house.
He said: "Rest assured,
I will inquire about it among the tribes."

واحد البشار جاني
عند القاييد بالزيتوني
قال لي راح مهني
نشاور عليها في الاعراش

A man with a dirty burnūs
Brought me good news.
He told me that the Banī Faraḥ took it
And won't return it.

خرج واحد المربع
برنوصه قاع مودج
إداوها بني فرح
بالصح ما يقبلوهاش

I searched everywhere,
I went to Si Jallūl bin al-Ṭayyib.
He was merry and joyful,
He was told it had no owner.

ما خليب حتى مضرب
عند سي جللول بن الطيب
نصيبو زاهي ومطرب
مولاها قالو ماكاش

A lunatic went looking for it,
He sold it in Talghūt.

خرج ليها واحد الملهوث
باعوها في تالغوت

His ʿabāy is full of lice,
He never washes it.

عبايته غير البرغوث
عمره ما يغسلهاش

I asked chief Bin Maḥmūd for advice,
I said: "You are the model of generosity."
He replied: "They pull the plow with it
At Muḥa bin Harkāsh's place."

شورت عليها القايد بن محمود
قلت له إنت حرم الجود
قالي ينجرو بيها غير العود
عند موحى بن هرকাশ

I wondered if the Ḥarshāwa took it,
And hid it in a hermitage,
Then sold it to the Zwāwa,
They used it to make wool combs.

قلت له داوها حرشاوة
وخزنوها في الخلوة
باعوها لزواوة
نجرو بيها كم من قرداش

I went about running and looking,
Until I reached Si Muḥa bin Frāyes.
He cuts wood with it,
He is always digging in the forest.

رحت نمشي ونحوس
حتى لسي موحى بن فرايس
ينجر بيها وينساجس
في الغابة دايم نباش

When the Banī Ghumrayān took it
I asked Ṭāher bin ʿUthmān for advice.
He said: "It is with Si ʿAlī bin Slimān,
The one who constantly trims his beans."

داوها بني غمريان
وشاورت الطاهر بن عثمان
راهي عند سي علي بن سليمان
في فوله دايم نقاش

This tool is made of steel,
Melyānī bin al-Kebīr took it.
He digs a well with it,
But he never remains still in one place.

ذا الصنعة نتاع ذكير
داها الملياني بن الكبير
يحفرو بيها واحد البير
يتحول ما يبقاش

I walked and searched
Until I reached Bin al-Ahrash's son.
He told me: "Bin Marzūga took it,
The one who shakes and whose pipe is always lit."

رحت نمشي ونفتش
حتى لوليد بن الأحرش
قال لي داها بن مرزوقة يرعش
عاظ السبسي ما يطفاش

He who stole it is hiding it,
He took it to the *duwwār* of Bū Maʿad.
They hid it under the haystack,
Qā'id bin Laḥsen knows where to look for it.

واللي يخونها يتلبد
داها لدوار بومعد
خزنوها في المزود
والقايد بن لحسن فتاش

They told me in ʿArib,
It was used to set a trap for the fox,
But it fell in the Wād Zarādīb,
They dug with it but failed to find it.

ذكروها لي في عريب
دارو الحياية للذيب
طاحت في واحد الزراديپ
يحفرو ما جبروهاش

Zakkār's residents stumbled upon it,
They said: "It is a suitable tool for merchants."
When I fought with them,
They claimed it was worthless.

صابوها صحاب زكار
قالو توالم للتجار
درت أنا وياهم نقار
للصنعة قالوا ما تسواش

They took it to Milyana,
And sold it to the gardeners.
It is suitable for a plot,
But it fell in the hands of a lazy lot.

هبطو بيها لمليانة
باعوها لاصحاب الجردينة
توالم للدكانة
طاحت في يد الشواش

A hungry man took it,
He sold it in Bū Ḥalwān
In exchange for some dry figs,
Enough to last him four dinners.

خرج ليها واحد الجيعان
باعها في بوحلوان
بالكروموس اللي يليان
أربع لياالي ما يتعشاش

Its iron is beautiful and shiny,
They said "It is a useful tool."
They sold it in Bū Madfa^c,
Its *qā'id* is worthless.

حديدها زين ويلمع
هذا الحاجة قالو تنفع
باعوها في بومدفع
قايدهم ما يسواهاش

I asked a fortuneteller,
She told me: "Take the train,
Search in every city,
It was sold in al-Ḥarrāsh."

شاورت القزاة
قالت لي تركب في الماشينة
تحوس كل مدينة
راهي إنباعت في الحراش

Rice

الرز

It is chalky white,
Stacked in the bag.
When October comes around,
It is the object of bargains.

أبيض مجير
في وسط المشكر
كي يدخل اكتوبر
إعليه يساوم

Then comes December,
And January too;
February passed,
It makes its presence felt.

يدخل دوجمبر
حتى لناير
فوت لفبراير
هو يتكلم

It lived in the country of the blacks,
It received little appreciation there.
Indians went to fetch it
And brought it back.

كان في بر السود
في بلادو محدود
راحوليه هنود
جابهو عليهم

It arrived by train,
It stepped down at the station.
All the young people rushed about
Carrying their provision bags.

من بابور النار
انزل في لاقار
هدت قاع الصغار
غي بمزاودهم

The Jew told them:
"Let's make a deal,
It is intended for the poor,
Its cheap price is ideal."

قالهم النعيل
اندير تاويل
ينفع القليل
والرخيص يوالم

Whenever it arrives in the country,
Promises are made.
Even the *qā'id*s rejoice
With the rest of the population.

كي يوصل البلاد
يعطو في لوعاد
حتى للقياد
يزهارو معاهم

Finding it cheap,
They buy it in bushels.

كي صابوه رخيص
كيل بالتليس

It is better than *rfīs*,³¹
When cooked with meat.

هو خير مل رفيس
كي يطيب مع اللحم

The aghas buy it,
Clad in their embroidered costumes.
Even the judges
Feed on it.

اشراوه لغوات
موالين القاطات
حتى للقظات
راه معيشتهم

Their head judge
Practices forgery;
He fell in the well [i.e., stooped low],
Ruling unfairly.

رايسهم كبير
يكتب بالتزوير
أو طايح في البير
بالباطل يحكم

He lives in a brick house,
Has sheets and mattresses.
Makes his purchases
With money illegally earned.

ساكن في الياجور
ومطارح ويزور
ودراهم الجور
ايكيل بيهم

Even the upholder of justice
Contacts the Jew.
While ruling in court,
He sends messages with his mouth askew.

أو حتى العادل
لليهودي يرسل
ويروح يحلل
ويغمن بالفم

Wearing his camel-hair *burnūs*,
He seeks the merchant,
Buys on credit,
And signs his name on a parchment.

يلبس البيدي
أو يقصد اليهودي
يشري بالكريدي
أو في الكاغط يرسم

People weigh th rice,
And talk about it.
It has a problem:
It is difficult to digest.

الناس اتكيل فيه
أو يهدرو فيه
هادي علة فيه
قالوا لي يقهم

The *ṭulbā* buy it,
And need no charity.
They put an end to hunger,
So common in their ranks.

يشروه الطلبة
أو ينساو الرتبة
يقلعو الغلبة
إللي شاعت فيهم

I weighed some and rejoiced,
Took it home with me,
Cooked it in oil,
And pieces of suet as well.

كيلتو وزهيت
واديت للبيت
درت معاه الزيت
مرسوات شحم

There was a lot on the scale,
It cheered me up.
I paid for it willingly
And took it home.

عجبني في الميزان
طلع لي غيوان
خلصتو فرحان
وقصدت المرسوم

Every night, large quantities
Of mallow confronted rice,
Saying: "I am the favorite here,
Leave this site."

اخرج ليه الخبير
كل ليلة دهليز
قالوا: أنا عزيز
تتحول من ثمة

Rice replied:
"I have been everywhere,
Even to the land of the Druze:
Ask their leader.

انطاق ليه الروز:
في لوطان انجوز
ما خليت دروز
سقسسي قايدهم

While you lament,
I am at ease,
Loved by young women,
And eager to please."

وانت تتلاوح
وانا نظراوح
إيشيرات تتماوح
وعزيز عليهم

The mallow said: "In Senegal,
The blacks eat you,
You stink
And smell in the mouth."

إننت في ساليقان
ياكلوك الوصفان
شكيتك مصنان
وتخزنر الغم

Rice replied: "This is too much blame,
You are certainly jealous,
Because in Algiers
I enjoy all favors,

كترت المعابر
وثرنتك غاير
وانا في الدزاير
داير نتنعم

While you are meant for the *khammās*;
You are a cheap, rotten produce.
Your price is so low,
No one bargains over you.

وانت لبني مخمس
مقبوس وبأخس
في السومة راخس
لا حد يساوم

You grow in silos,
With a grayish-blue color,
Together with *bū khanfar*,³²
Which has annoying prickles."

تنبت في المطمر
أزرق مزنجر
مع بوخنفر
شوكو يعدم

The wild artichoke looked in
And said: "Go away,

طلت القرنية
قالت: روح علينا

We have had it with you,
Your arguments are false."

أو بركة يزينا
في الزور تخاصم

Rice responded: "I am pure,
I weigh nicely on the scale.
I welcome my guests,
I am never embarrassed,

قال أنا صافي
أو ميزاني وافي
نخرج لضيفاني
أو عمري ما نحشم

While you are full of fibers,
All those who eat you
Have ruined stomachs
And bony faces.

وانتي غير سلوك
قاع اللي ياكلوك
فوادهم مهلوك
والوجه معظم

You grow in ditches,
You are handled with shovels.
Beautiful women dislike you,
You stain their mouths."

تنوضي في الفوسيات
تنقاسي بالبالات
عافوك الخودات
تسبغ في الفم

The artichoke replied: "I grow in ravines,
My stems thicken.
They turn white,
Suitable then for people to munch on.

ننبت في لفياظ
ونربي لفخاظ
عسلوجي بيباض
للغز يوالم

The city girl cooks me,
She knows how to handle matters.
You poke fun at me,
You are so unfair."

اتطيبيني بنت احذر
تعرف اتمصر
وانت تتمسخر
يا داك الظالم

"When April comes around,
My importance increases:
I become a dessert,
Served to the ruler."

كي يدخل بيرير
يضحي شاني كبير
ونصبح ديسير
نخرج للحاكم

Then came the broad bean and said to the rice:
"Get out, you vile grain!"
"Very well, you ogre," said the rice,
"I leave this place for you."

ساعة جاه الفول:
إنهـب يا مذلول!
ها صحة يا لغول
ها ليك المرسوم

Burning Fever in Bū Ḥalwān

الحمى في بو حلوان

What do you want me to tell you, brothers,
About this illness which afflicted me,
I spent the night thinking,
Enduring great pain.

يا خوتي ماذا نحكيكم
من ذا الظر بدا يتلايم
طول الليل انبات انخمم
وأنا في واحد التزيار

I was wearing a long, patched burnūs
During this night spent in Kāf al-Jalīb,
Tears were flowing from my eyes,
And I asked for the intercession of Sīdī Warār.

ذريال طويل امجعلب
ذيك الليلة في كاف الجلب
والدمعة غير تدهرب
نطلب في سيدي ورار

I went on walking
From sunset to nightfall,
Trying to reach Sīdī ʿUkāsha,³³
Who could soothe my suffering.

ظليت أنا نمشي
بين المغرب والعشى
نلحق سيدي عكاشة
هو يطفني ذو لظرار

It was on a Saturday,
While crossing Bū Ḥalwān,
That I landed near the semaphore,
Invoking Mūlāy Zakkār [Sīdī ʿAbd al-Qādir].

ذاك اليوم انهار السبت
وعلى بو حلوان فايت
للرياشة ثم تدهربت
نطلب في مولاي زكار

In the afternoon, past the ʿaṣr,
I became completely perplexed,
“Take the easy road,” he whispered,
“Some travelers will cross your way.”

كي مظاني وقت العاصر
طلحت أنايا متحير
خوذ الطريق اللي تتياسر
تلقني ثم لخطر

When I arrived at al-Jandal³⁴
I knew no one, but I sauntered along the way;
All the members of a brotherhood
Were praising the chosen Prophet.

منين وصلت الجندل
ما نعرف حد غير اندلل
لغوان كل اتجلل
تذكر في النبي المختار

My illness caused me to lose half my weight,
My *burnūs* was my only pillow,

هذا المرض امطيح نصي
موسد غير برنوصي

I inquired about the *ṭulbā*
And the fire worshiper.³⁵

وعلى الطلبة ثم انصقصي
واللي يخدم عبد النار

I was aiming toward ʿAyn Lishyākh,³⁶
While my fever felt like lashes,
And my feet began to swell;
I felt extreme pain, like poison in my toenails.

صديت لعين لشيخ
والحمى عليا سلاخ
كرعيا بداو التنفاخ
السم خرج لي من لظفار

To the good people of Ḥannāsha I went,
Begging for the help of al-ʿAṣānīn;³⁷
Oh! Sidi al-Shaykh Bin al-Dīn,³⁸
You are able to end my torment.

رحت الحناشة الزينين
نطلب ثم في العصانين
أسيدي الشيخ بن الدين
إنت تنمي ذا المضمار

One day my condition deteriorated,
When I woke up I was not able to move.
“Go join your family,” they said,
“Take the dusty road.”

ذاك اليوم ادرك
اصبحت أنا يا بارك
قالولي تمشي لهلك
خوذ اطريق مع لغبار

With great eagerness I moved,
I implored Sidi Sarḥān’s help,
Soon I saw a Citroën
With its engine running.

رحت أنا نجري لهفان
نطلب في سيدي سرحان
صبت ثم سيتر
في الموتور قادات النار

The car was comfortable and moved well,
“Look all around you,” they said,
“It costs three francs a ride,
To go to the railway station.”

مقيومة حرج وتحراك
شوف قدامك ووراك
السومة بثلاثة فرانك
غيرة تنزل في لاقار

I arrived there a little lost,
Looking for Mūlāy ʿAbd al-Qādir;
I saw the train on the bridge—
I thought it came through the tunnel.

وصلت أنا ثم محير
نطلب مولاي عبد القادر
والمشينة في القناطر
في بالي خرجت من الغار

I went there to pay,
Its chimney was made of copper,
There were Christians³⁹ and foreigners along the way,
The station master blew his whistle.

رحت أنا ثم نخلص
ذاك الشيمني قاع منحس
وانصاره وعلوج تساييس
ذاك الشيف ابد التصفار

It moves on rails,
It goes forward by jolts,
As we crossed La Farente⁴⁰
It made a deafening sound.

تمشي فوق الرايات
تتقرب غير بالنويات
منين عقينا لافارنت
تسمعلو حسو صرصار

It went quickly through °Arib
And moved across Shlif,
Sīdī Yaḥyā's shrine was decorated,
He has visitors every day.⁴¹

فاتت على عريب تسكف
هي قطعت من شلف
سیدی یحیی ثم امزخرف
كل يوم يجوه الزيار

It passed a small house
As they began to tighten the brakes,
It stopped in front of a building,
"This is the station," I was told.

فاتت من لاميزونيت
ابداء يسيرو في الفران
هي قبالي رينات
قالولي هذي لاقار

I went toward the Ponts et Chaussées,⁴²
The chief gave me plenty of advice,
All my friends were inquiring about me,
I was burning with longing for them.

خرجت أنا للبوصوصي
ذاك الشيف غير يوصي
لحباب كل اتساقسي
من ذا الوحش اقدات النار

The holy men of God
Are at the entrance of °Ayn al-Difla,
They are the good people
Who cure all pain.

الرجال دوي ثم قبالة
حتى ندخل عين الدفلة
هذو زينين الحالة
إللي ينحوذا الضمار

I then met the *ṭulbā*,
Those good companions
Who can cure my illness,
Mōḥā bin Najjār was with them.

انصيب هذوك الطلبة
هما الزينين الصلبة
هما الللي ينحوذي الغلبة
معاهم موحا بن نجار

I collapsed there, before them,
Exhausted, I appealed to Sī Belqāsem:
"I beg you cure my illness,
Write me a couple of sentences."⁴³

طحت أنا ثم مهرشم
لاغيت على سي بلقاسم
لاغناش تبرد ذي السم
تكتبلي جوز اسطار

He replied: "My writing is costly;
Burn incense for six nights,
Slaughter a big, white rooster,⁴⁴
And your affliction will then be over."

قالی کتبت غالي
واتبخر ست ليالي
سردوك ابيض وعالي
هو يقلع ذي العقار

But my condition deteriorated;
I went to Sī Bin Sa'īd,
He gave me another *ḥijāb*
And recommended more incense fumigation.

ثم علي الحال يزيد
رحت أنايا لسي بن سعيد
دار لي حجاب جديد
قالی قوي متبخار

I was determined to recover with modern medicine,
These amulets I did not want any more,

قلت أنا نبري فنطاري
مل كتبة هذي فازي

I went to Sī Qwaydar al-Barāzī,
Who has some medications.

رحت لسي قويدر البرازي
إلي عندو كم من عقار

I went to the *gurbī*
Of Shaykh Sī Mūḥā al-^cArbī,
With the help of God
I will be cured of my illness.

جيت أنا للقربي
للشيخ سي موحى العربي
بيجاه همه ربي
نبري من هذو لضرار

Untitled Poem

بدون عنوان

The year the Kabyles became chiefs
The whole world was decorated.

عام القبائل فاتو رياس
تبروقت فيه قاع الدينا

They are as intelligent as a cow
With a yoke resting on a pillow.

الفهامة غير بحال «أفوناس»
غير مضمدم وزيد وغناية

He is intelligent, understands all languages,
He is amazing when speaking Russian.

تبليجا ويفهم لغة الاجناس
يحيرك بحديث الروسية

When the Khalīfa visits, he talks
wisely to him
And honors him speaking Kabyle.

الا ييجي الخليفة يهدر له حديث قياس
يواجهه هو بالكنفية

The Khalīfa, I do not know how,
Understands what he tells him.

مسيو الخليفة ما يشنفاسر
تبدا الفهامة تجيه شوية

Believe me, I heard his
Explanations in French.

الاغاد فلي قايس ليغاس
يبدا يفصل في الرومية

“Wake Omar up and ask him to come,
Tell him let’s go

سكر أعمار ايناس أنياس
ايمض للميلود ايناسيا

To Jallūl, and inform him
Today we form the committee.”

رح الجلول أقل النفاس
أس نعمل الجمعية

Bū Rdūsa, together with Bū °Fās
Will make a *shāshiyya* with chaff.

بو ردوسه مع بو عفاس
من القراش يصنع شاشية

His farming consists in digging with a hoe,
Every day he measures the grilled wheat.

ما يدير من الفلاحة يحرث بالفاس
كل يوم راه يقيس قلية

When he fertilizes he covers the whole place,
The roofs of the tents as well!

يغلق السوايح كم اقلاص
فوق الخيام ثان يزيد شوية

He distributes meat generously,
leaving people perplexed,
For the new year he slaughtered a lamb.

نفاق في اللحم حارت فيه الناس
كيقرن العام يذبح حولية

He slaughters it only when it is sick,
Is scabby, or has pneumonia.

ما يذبحهاش غير قطع منها لياسر
تجرب ولا إلتطيح فيها رية

And if the jackal devours it,
He tells him, "This thing cost me a great deal."

والا الذيب حلقمها في الافراس
يقول له يا حية غلات عليـة

Sleeping in ʿAfrūn

بايت في عفرون

Sleeping in ʿAfrūn drove me crazy,
My tears flowed like a gushing spring.

بايت في عفرون راني كالمهبول
ودموعي كالعين تجري هوطالة

I woke up early, the morning star
was shining in the sky,
The snow had covered the Muzāya mountains.

بكرت مع الصباح والنجمة قساح
والثلج على الجبال غطى موزاية

We came to you in all haste, people of Blida,
May your patron's invocation destroy
our enemy.

جيناكم هدة، يا ناس البليدة
ودعوة سيدكم جامدة على قلب عدونا

Help me, Sidi Yaʿqūb, I am in straits,
You have the elixir of youth, let me drink from it.

سيدي يعقوب غيثنى، راني مفصوب
وعندك فضل الشبوب منه تسقينا

I went down the stairs, my knee was shaking,
I greeted a foreigner, enemy of our Prophet.

هودت مع الدروج والركبة مخلوج
ونبايع للعلوج، عديان نبينا

My room is like a prison, a solitary jail, a cell,
Food is tasteless under my teeth.

راني في حبس، كاشو وإلا سيلول
والمضغة في الضروس ما فيها بنة

I am wearing a cape, it is the cause of
my sadness,

لابس كيوط، خاطري منو مشطون

I am not wearing a ʿabāya nor a lithām,
my head is covered with a shāshiyya.

لا عباية لا لثام، داير شاشية.

Drought

الوقفه

This has been a long wait
O noble people!
O khulafa!
You who provide.

طالت هذي الوقفة
يا الشرفة
والخلفا
أهل التدبير

The Muslims are suffering
O saints of our region!
O *ṭulbā*!
You who explain the texts.

المسلمين في غلبة
يا أهل النوبة
والطلبة
أهل التفسير

Put an end to our bad luck
With science and prayer sessions,
With Bin Mūsā's intercession
And the blessings of al-Bashīr.

تنفوا ذا النحسة
بالعلم والجلسة
بجاه بن موسى
أو بركة البشير

We will visit the mystics,
Men of knowledge and faith,
Their light will burn forever,
Their proofs are infinite.

إنزوروا البودالا
أهل العلم والحالة
وإمصاييح نشالا
أو برهانهم غزير

We will visit the *wālis*,
Holders of secrets and evidence,
At every mountain turn
Their plaster mausoleums appear.

إنزوروا الأوليا
أهل السر والنية
في كل ثانية
وقبابهم بالجير

O poets,
Proud people,
This time
Young and old complain.

أ الشعارة
أهل النعرة
إبقات ذي المرة
تتناوح كبيرها واصغير

You must band and unite,
Open your pockets,

يخص تلتنموا
مل جيب تغرموا

And implore
The miracle performers.

وتحشمو
إللي برهانهم كبير

O people of proof,
Consider the poor children,
Save those who are desperate
And have fallen to the bottom of the well.⁴⁶

يا أهل البرهان
في طوع ذي الصبيان
اتسلكوا إللي دهشان
طايح في البير

We will visit the elders,
People of the Qur'an,
To recover our happiness
At the sight of a good harvest.

نزوروا الشيوخ
أهل النسخة
واتجيلنا نفخة
صابة العين اتحير

O masters,
We are tired of losses,
Help our plants,
Our wheat and barley.

يا سادات
ملينا من الطلحات
غيثوا ذي النبات
قمحها وشعير

The fields turn green
But the blooms soon fall down,
Save this harvest now,
For us to look forward to the month of April.

في شاوها يخضار
وابغا يجيح نوار
سجولنا ذي الثمار
ويجي شهر يبرير

O you poor mystics,⁴⁷
You proud ascetics,
Save it on the spot,
Or we are completely lost.

يا الفقرا
أهل النعرة
غيثوه في مرة
واحنا إلا في الجور

O humble mystics,
Help us quickly,
For Gabriel's sake,
The destroyer of palaces.

يا المساكين
غيثونا في الحين
بصاحب جبرين
هدام القصور

O Mediator,⁴⁸
Dissipate this anxiety.
The harvest is lost,
It is mixed with mud.

يا صاحب الشفعة
اتفك ذي الخلعة
طالحت في القاعة
وامخوطة بغدير

The people are to be pitied,
Come to our rescue,
You are our Prophet,
Save us with your great wisdom.

الناس مغبونة
واتفرج علينا
إنت نبينا
واتفك بالتقدير

From East to West
The raven has turned gray,
O Reader of the unknown,
Help us in our ordeal.

م الشرق للمغرب
فيها الغراب يشيب
ها عالم الغيب
واتحن بالتيسير

It is the same everywhere,
For the noble and the ignoble as well,
There is no pride left for anyone,
Who falls to the bottom of the well.

راهي قاع كيف كيف
عظا يدي وشريف
اخلاص قاع النيف
كي طايحة في البير

We are all alike,
Moving toward the abyss,
While the children of the Rūmiyya
Made the metal fly.

ولات مستوية
تجري في الهاوية
ولاد رومية
صنعوا الحديد يطير

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Notes

- 1 Mohammed Hadj-Sadok retired from his post as inspector-general of public education in 1974. He received the Aggrégation in Arabic from the Ecole des Langues Orientales in Paris. His teaching career included a position as assistant professor at the University of Algiers (1955–56) and as principal of the Lycée d'Alger at al-Abyār (el-Biar; 1956–60).
- 2 A *khammās* receives one fifth of the produce of the land he cultivates
- 3 Hadj-Sadok was instrumental in arranging for ʿAlilī to receive a modest subsidy from the Governor's office.
- 4 Letter from Hadj-Sadok to the author, August 6, 1999.
- 5 I refer the reader to a study by Hadj-Sadok, "La guerre 1939–1940 selon un soldat-poète algérien" (1973).
- 6 I had been introduced to Mohammed Hadj-Sadok by Ms. Yamina Kébir in the late 1980s during one of my frequent trips to Paris, where he lives. A common friend of the Hadj-Sadoks and myself, Ms. Kébir knew my interest in Algerian folklore and was also aware of Hadj-Sadok's large collection of folk poetry.
- 7 Son of al-Bashīr al-Ibrāhīmī, one of the main figures of the Association of the Muslim ʿUlama of Algeria, founded in 1931.
- 8 Berbers, native inhabitants of the Maghrib, are a complex ethnic group, each with a distinct language, the Kabyle being the largest. They converted to Islam with the Arab conquest of North Africa in the seventh century.
- 9 Some proverbs clearly reflect this tendency: al-kalām ʿalayy we'l-maʿnā ʿalā ghayrī ['the words are addressed to me, but meant for someone else'] (Algerian), al-kalām elik yā jāra ['these words are meant for you, neighbor'] (countries of the Levant).
- 10 From the subtitle of a book by Ferhāt ʿAbbās, 1962.
- 11 A term used mainly in the Maghrib, derived from the verb *madaḥa* 'to praise,' *maddāḥ* refers to an itinerant reciter of religious or secular poems.
- 12 Other examples of poetry composed and recited in closed circles by Maghribi women are the *tibrāʿ* in Mauritania and the Western Sahara and the ʿurūbiyyāt of Fez in Morocco.
- 13 Quoted from a letter sent to Mohammed Hadj-Sadok by a friend, in which

he introduced Bin Karyū to him. Attached also is this poem composed by Karyū when he was appointed judge at al-Qulay^a and faced the prospect of being separated from the woman he loved. The same poem is quoted by Boubakeur (1990: 255–56), with slight differences in wording and the order of the verses, due most probably to oral transmission. The verses quoted here are from Hadj-Sadok's collection.

- 14 The form of some Algerian letters differs from their standard form in classical Arabic. An example is the spelling of the letters *fā'* and *qāf*. In Algeria, the first is written with one dot below and the second with one dot above, while in classical Arabic *fā'* has one dot above and *qāf* two dots above. Most of the handwritten folk poems in Hadj-Sadok's collection follow the Algerian spelling, including Karyū's poem. However, I have changed both letters here to their familiar spelling in classical Arabic.
- 15 From Hadj-Sadok's private collection.
- 16 The poet is using the Islamic calendar in this instance.
- 17 A recent publication, *Le raï* by Bouziane Daoudi (2000) traces the development of this genre and explains its origins and its revival in the 1980s.
- 18 One of the famous figures of *rāy* is Cheikha Rimitti, a "symbol of raï, its most prolific contributor" (Daoudi 2000: 51). Her most recent performance, to my knowledge, was in June 2000, in Rabat, Morocco.
- 19 For unknown reasons the name of the city of al-Aṣṇām (presently Shlif) is written in the text as liṣnāb.
- 20 The most virulent attacks came from two short-story writers, Aḥmad Riḍā Ḥuḥū and ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Shāfiʿī.
- 21 Djeha, also written Juḥā, is a semi-legendary character, a trickster whose adventures amuse and educate. Djeha's nail refers to the story of a house he sold. Before handing it over to its new owners, he hammered a nail in the wall. He would go later and ask to sit in the shade of his nail, which was not sold with the rest of the house!
- 22 The Banū Hilāl ('children of Hilāl') were members of a Bedouin Arab tribe that originated in the Arabian Peninsula in the eighth century. They moved first to Egypt and then to Tunisia, where they settled down.
- 23 See above for a discussion of this term.
- 24 For information on Juḥā see Maḥmūd ʿAbbās al-ʿAqqād's *Juḥā al-dāḥik al-muḍḥik* (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, n.d.).
- 25 *Al-Shihāb* was founded by Ibn Bādīs in 1925 and *al-Baṣāʾir* followed in 1936. It was suspended in 1939 and throughout the Second World War, and reappeared in 1947, lasting until 1956.
- 26 Both Bin Mūsā and al-Bashīr are names that refer to the Prophet Muḥammad.
- 27 The proofs are the miracles they performed.
- 28 'The boaster.' He was a greengrocer (information provided by

Mohammed Hadj Sadok, who knew most of the people mentioned in the poem).

- 29 His work consisted in grinding stones.
- 30 The hoe would be useful in making holes in the stone, facilitating their grinding.
- 31 This is a corruption of the French name Michel. He was a *qā'id* whom Hadj-Sadok knew personally. The story behind a Christian name for an Algerian *qā'id* goes back to the year 1867 when a famine and a typhus epidemic rendered many children orphans. They were cared for by Cardinal Lavigerie, who took them to France and raised them as Christians, returning them later to Algeria, in the hope of seeing them convert their compatriots.
- 32 Local Algerian dessert prepared with semolina and eaten with butter and honey or dates.
- 33 An edible wild plant.
- 34 A marabout in Bū Ḥalwān, buried in a tomb with a dome.
- 35 Situated southeast of Milyana.
- 36 A reference to a djinn that would cure him of his illness.
- 37 Situated south of Milyana.
- 38 A *wālī*.
- 39 A reference to a shaykh who founded a religious brotherhood in the fifteenth century, south of Oran in the region of al-Bayyīd. Shaykh Bin al-Dīn was a student of Sīdī Aḥmad bin Yūsif.
- 40 The term 'Christians' was used during the colonial period to refer to the European settlers in Algeria.
- 41 A small town near Milyana, now called Sīdī Lakhḍar.
- 42 A reference to the cemetery of 'Ayn al-Difla.
- 43 This refers to a paved road, but the name indicates the department in charge of road construction.
- 44 A reference to the amulets written by the *ṭulbās*, containing quotations from the Qur'ān.
- 45 The rooster is slaughtered at the moment the evil spirit leaves the patient.
- 46 Mohammed Hadj-Sadok's father. He established a Qur'anic school, where he taught for 65 years. His efforts helped spread Qur'anic teaching in the region. He was a learned man who had studied religion and Islamic philosophy.
- 47 That is, those who have difficulties.
- 48 The term refers to the Sufi mendicants.
- 49 The mediator referred to here is the Prophet Muḥammad.

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